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United States Patent [19]

Glanton et al.

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[45] **Date of Patent: Jul. 18, 2000**

[54] **SCHOOL BUS DOOR OPERATOR**

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[73] Assignee: **Navistar International Transportation Corp.**, Chicago, Ill.

[21] Appl. No.: **09/397,171**

[22] Filed: **Sep. 16, 1999**

Related U.S. Application Data

[60] Provisional application No. 60/101,065, Sep. 18, 1998.

[51] **Int. Cl.**[7] **B60J 1/08**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **296/146.4**; 296/29; 296/146.1

[58] **Field of Search** 296/29, 146.4; 49/328, 329, 366, 109, 108, 103; 74/102, 104

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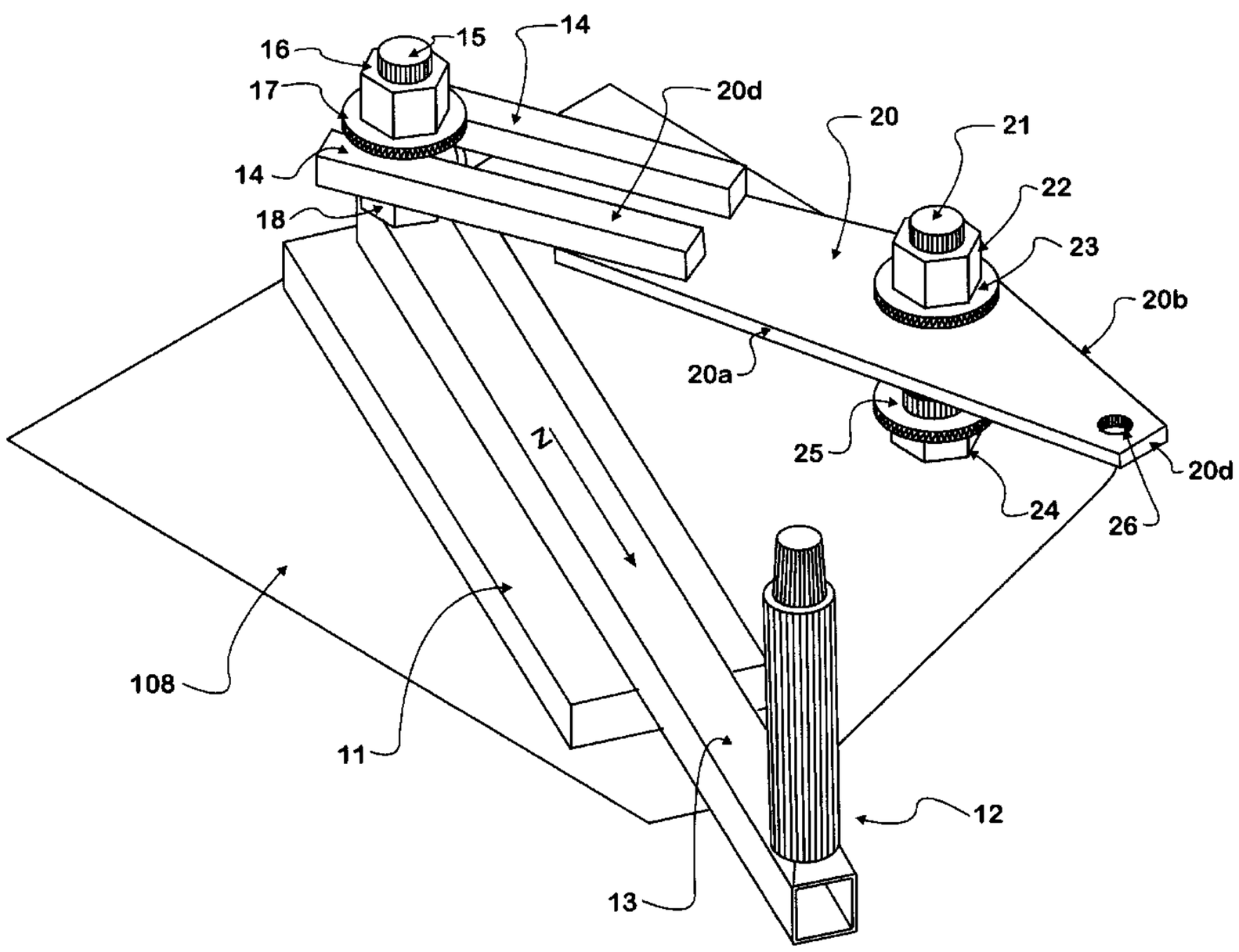
Primary Examiner—D. Glenn Dayoan
Assistant Examiner—Mickki D. Murray
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Jeffrey P. Calfa; Dennis Kelly Sullivan

[57] **ABSTRACT**

An improved school bus door operator for a school bus, or other public transportation vehicle or bus. The improved school bus door operator of this invention consists of a linear actuated school bus door operator with a handle for operation by the driver and the linkage tying the operator to the school bus door. The linear actuated school bus door operator allows the driver of the school bus to open and close the school bus door with a back and forth short-stroke linear movement of the handle. This should reduce repetitive stress injuries which school bus drivers have occasioned. The improved school bus door operator generally consists of a handle slide mechanism, a rotatable pivot arm, and a door linkage arm engaged to the school bus door. The handle slide mechanism further consists of a slide arm that may be moved linearly within the handle slide mechanism. The slide arm has a handle that juts out generally in a vertical direction at a rearward portion of the slide arm. At an opposite end of the slide arm from where the handle is engaged is an engagement pawl. The engagement bolt also rises from the slide arm in a generally vertical direction. The rotatable pivot arm has two guide rails or a through-slot. The engagement bolt of the slide arm fits between the guide rails or through-slot of the rotatable pivot arm. The rotatable pivot arm has a pivot bolt, which allows the pivot arm to rotate on the dash or other mounting surface in the school bus.

33 Claims, 19 Drawing Sheets



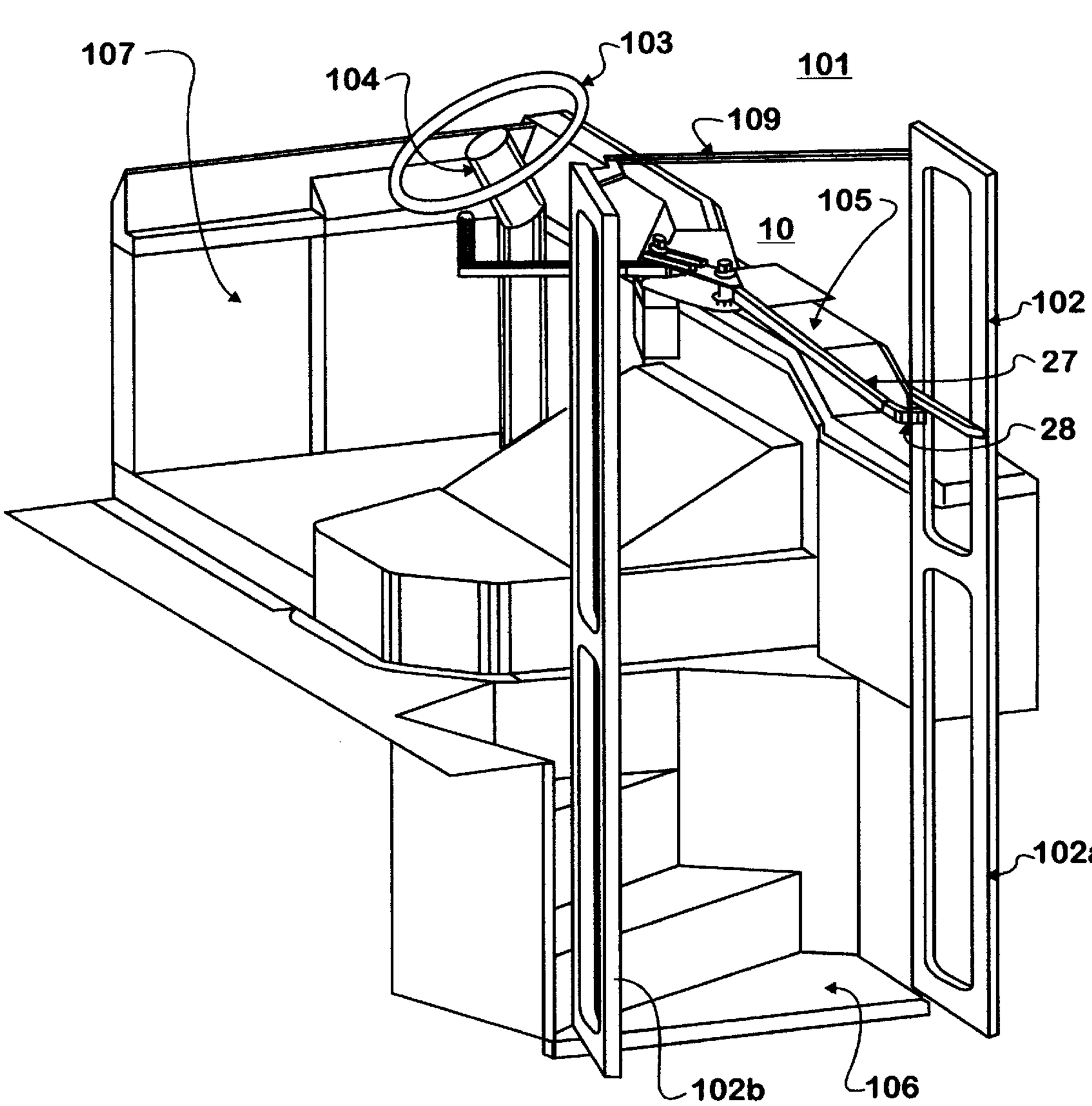


FIG. 1

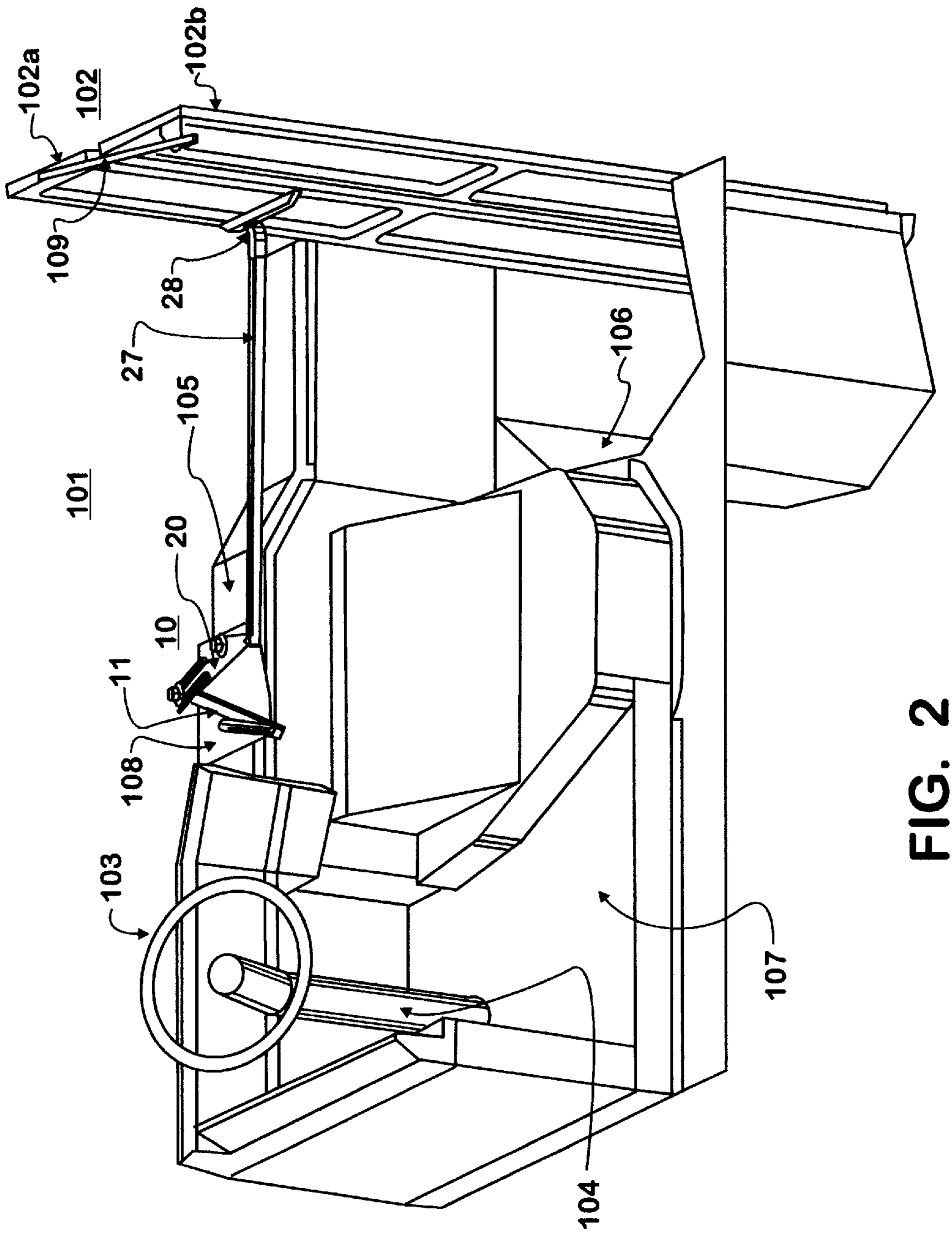


FIG. 2

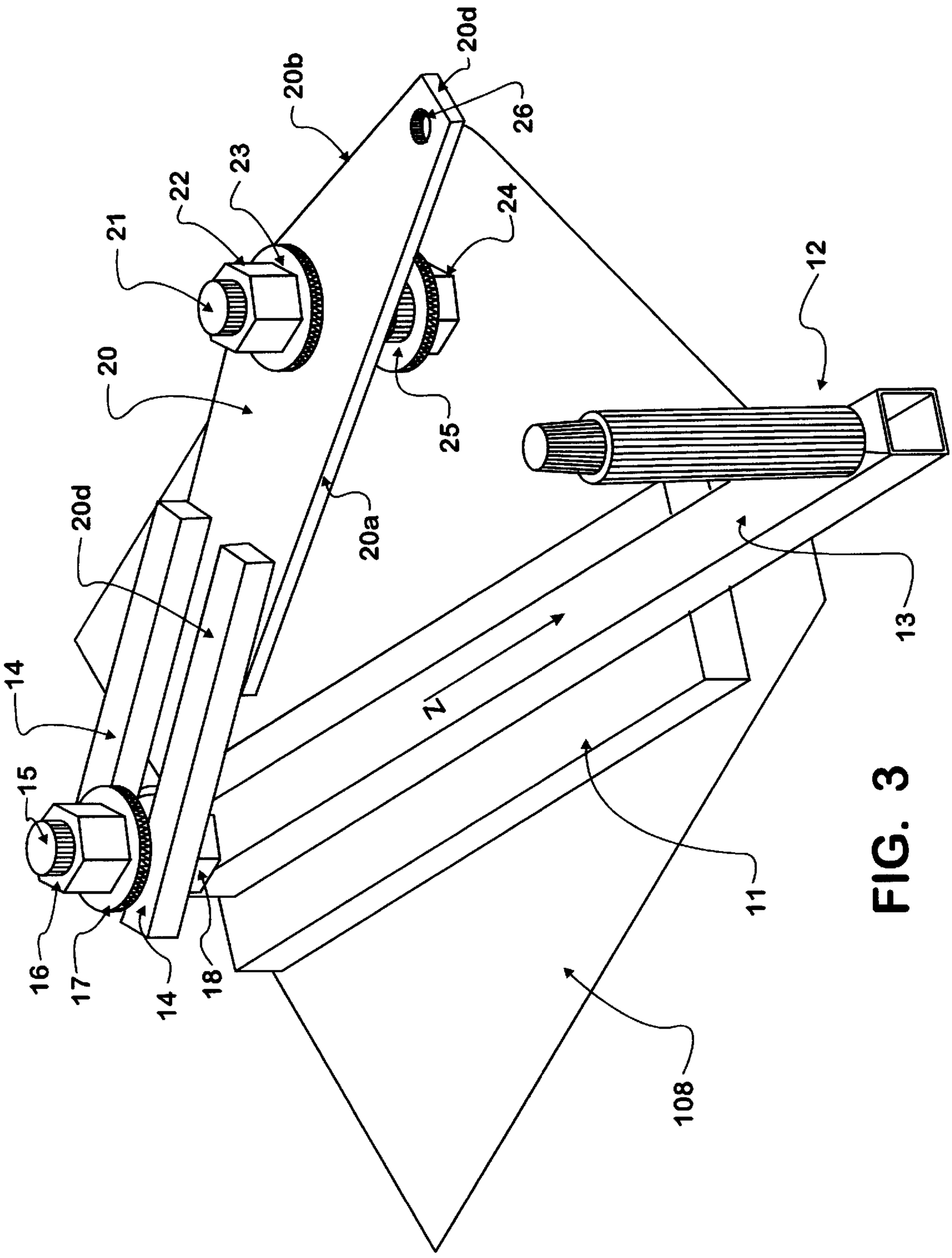


FIG. 3

FIG. 4

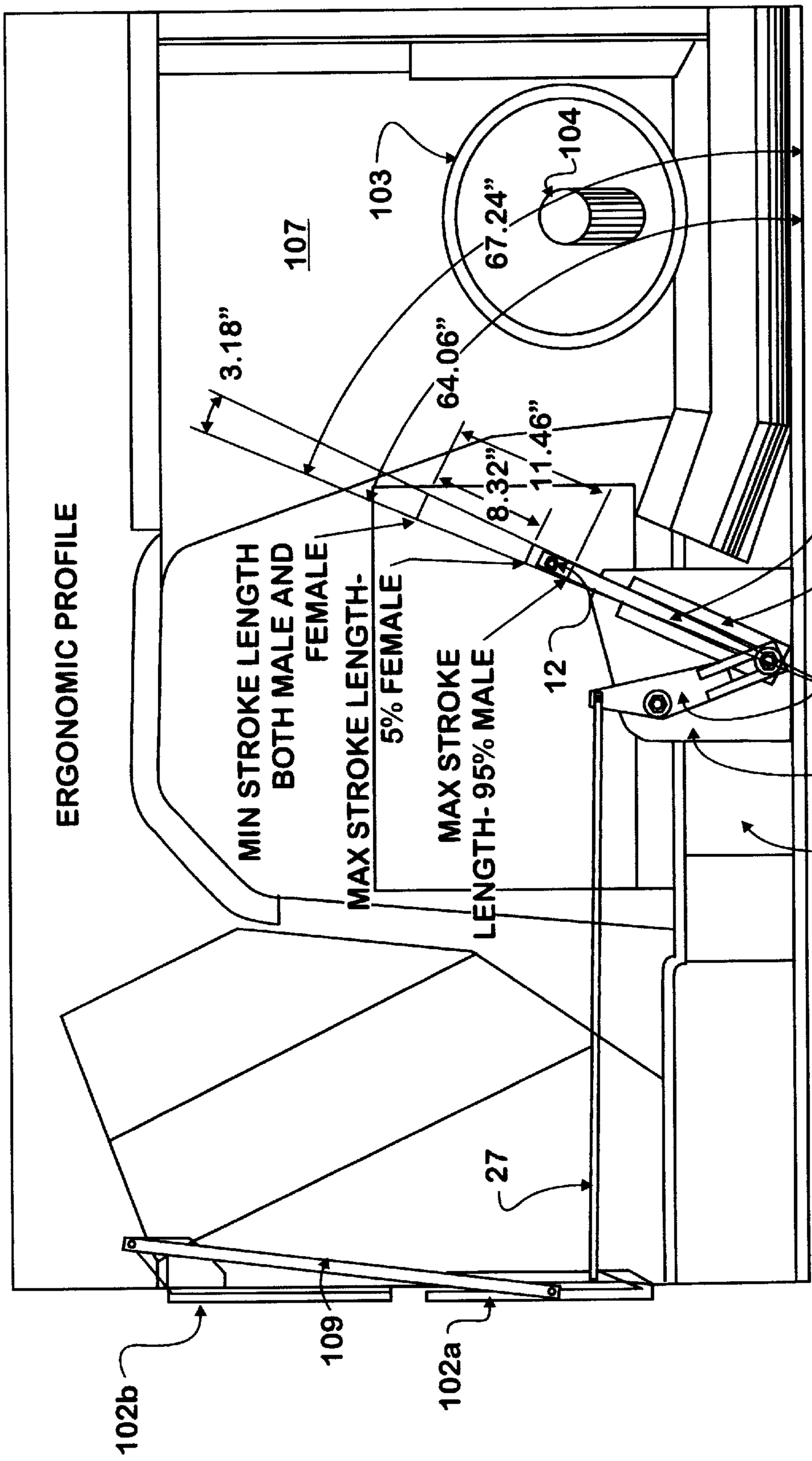
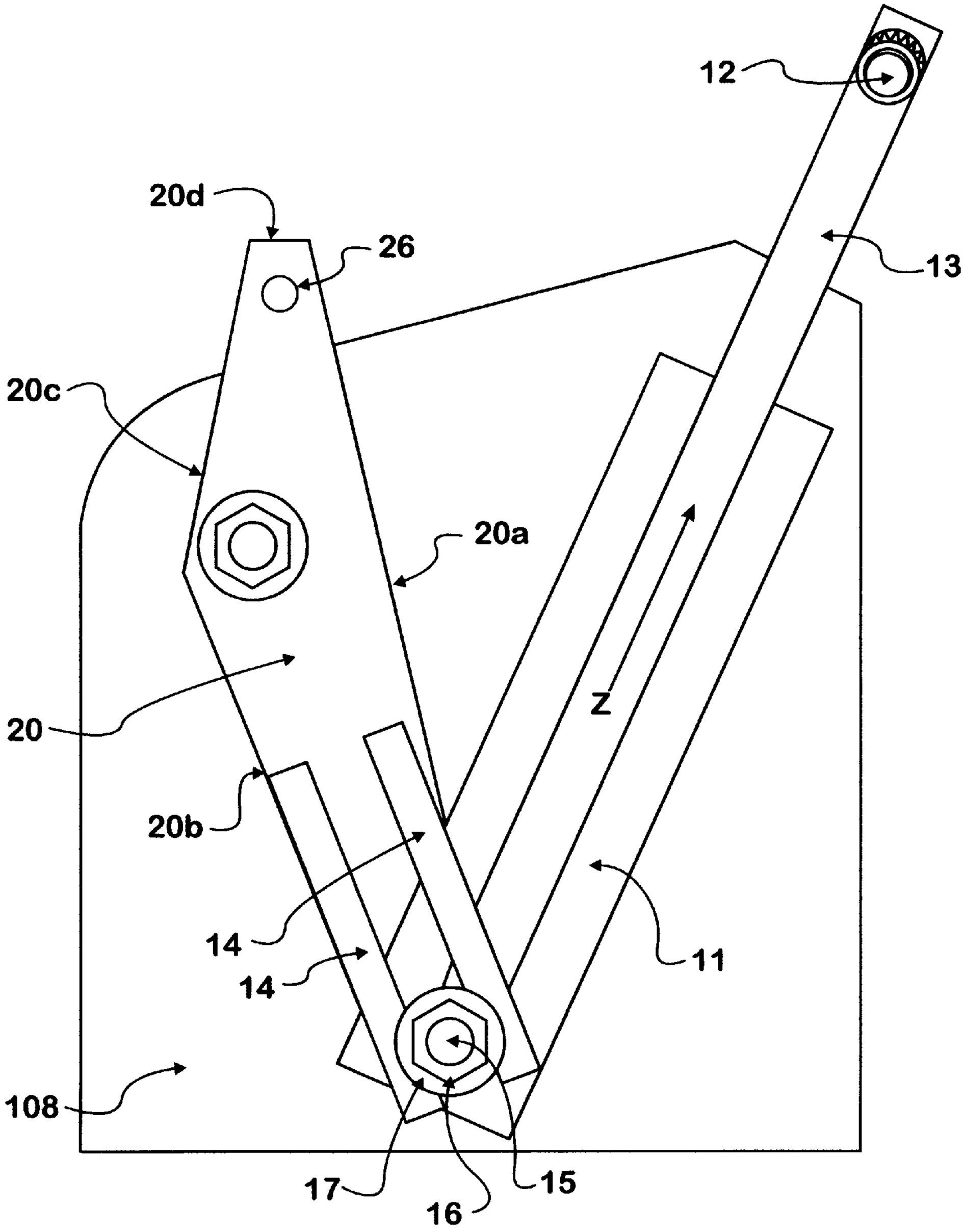

ERGONOMIC PROFILE
MIN STROKE LENGTH BOTH MALE AND FEMALE
MAX STROKE LENGTH- 5% FEMALE
MAX STROKE LENGTH- 95% MALE
107
103
104
67.24"
64.06"
3.18"
8.32"
11.46"
12
11
13
20
108
105
27
109
102b
102a

FIG. 5



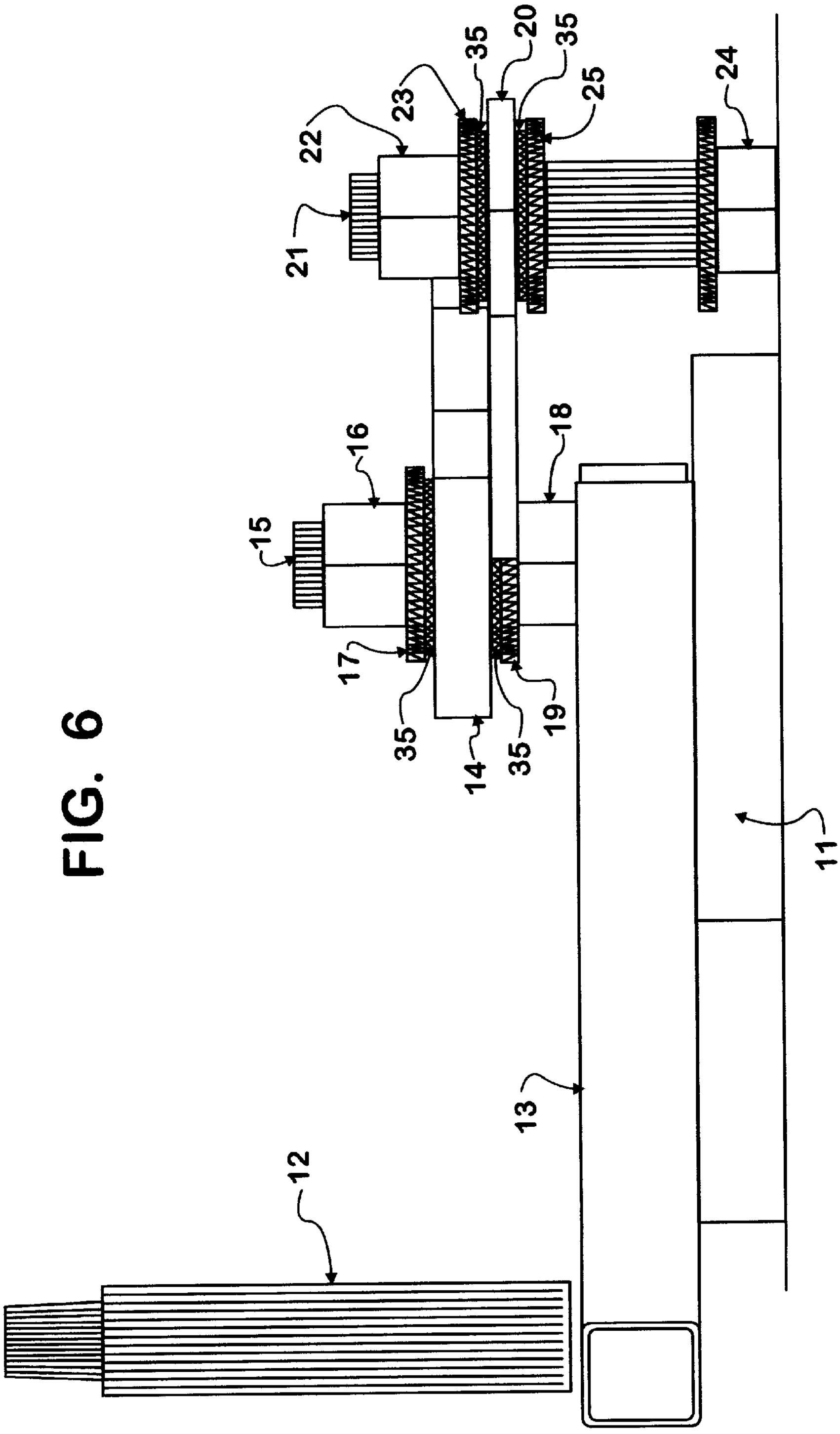


FIG. 6

FIG. 7

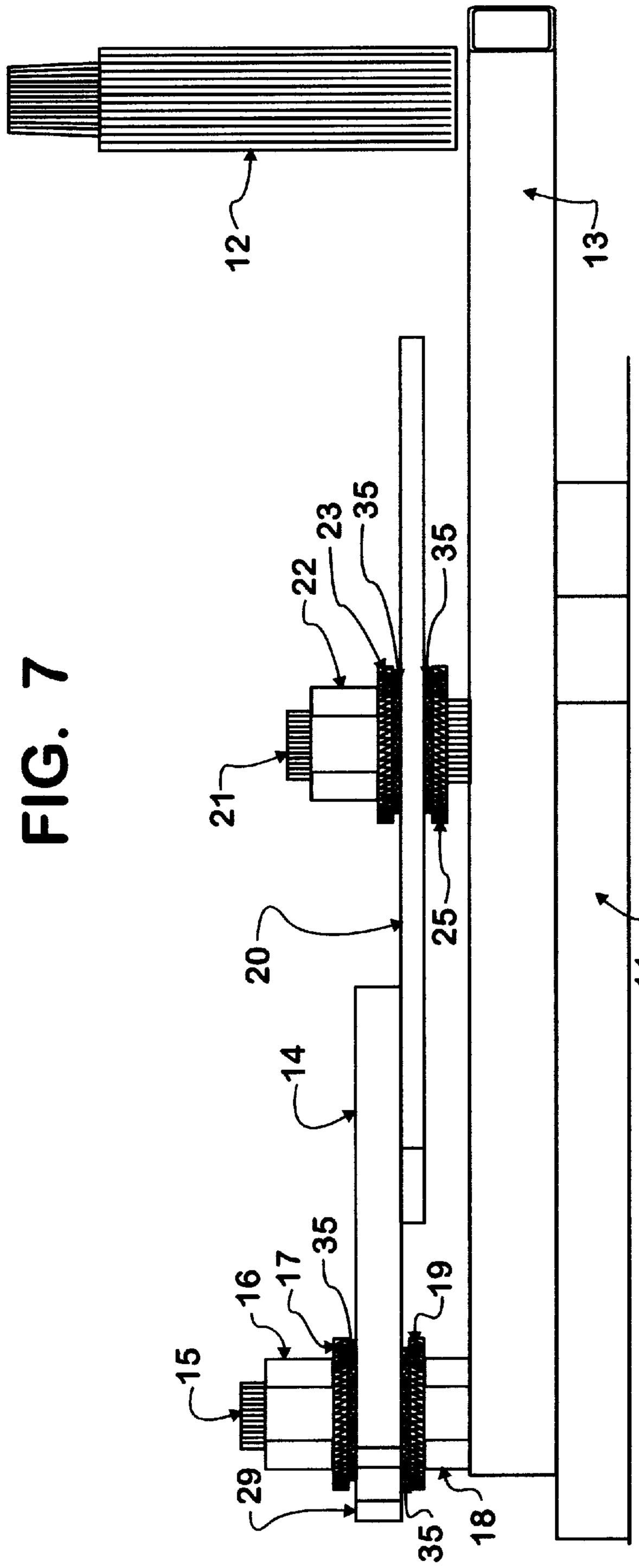


FIG. 8

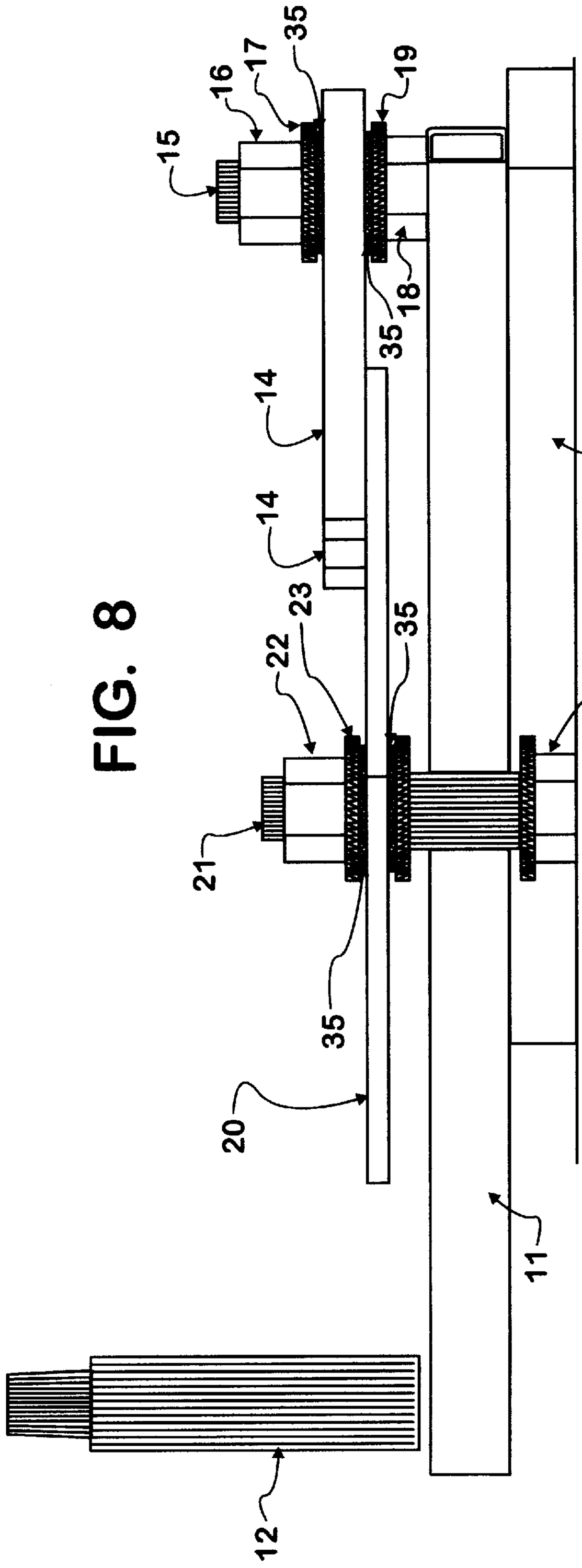


FIG. 9A

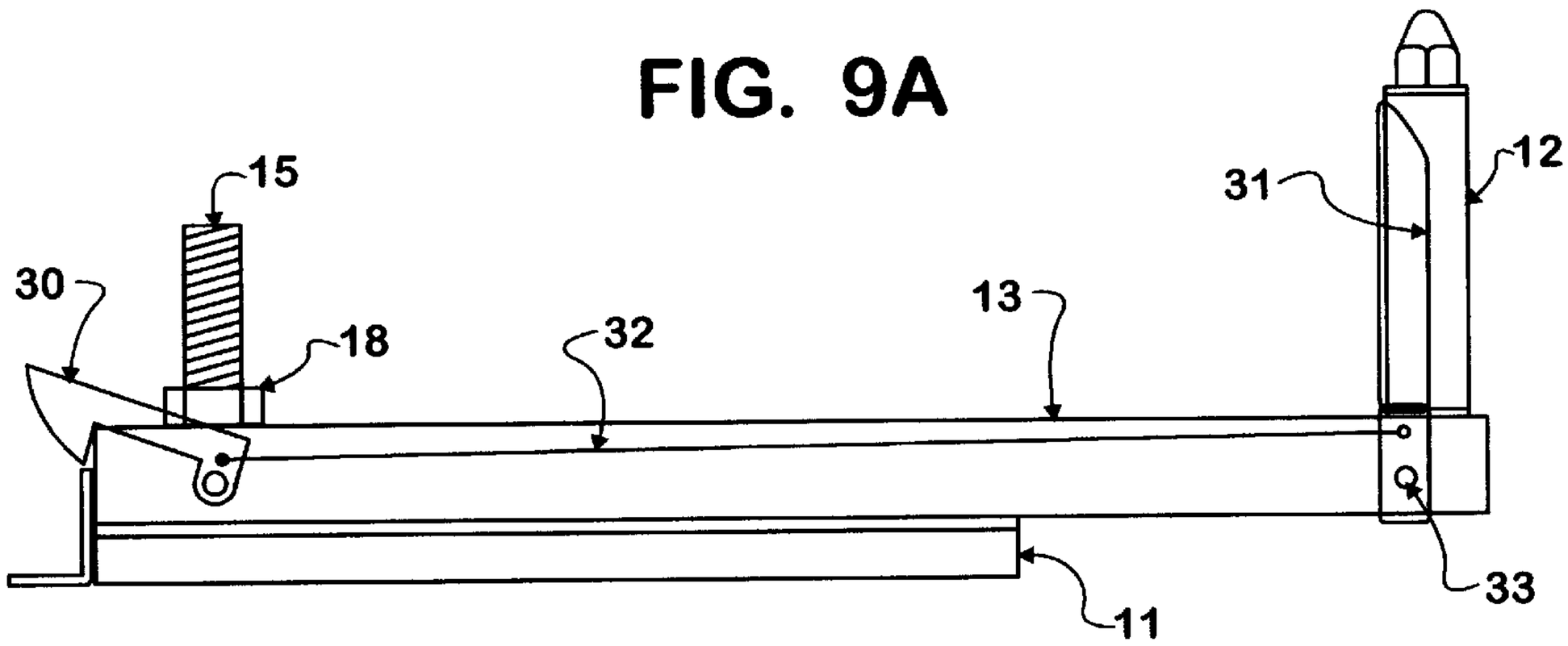


FIG. 9C

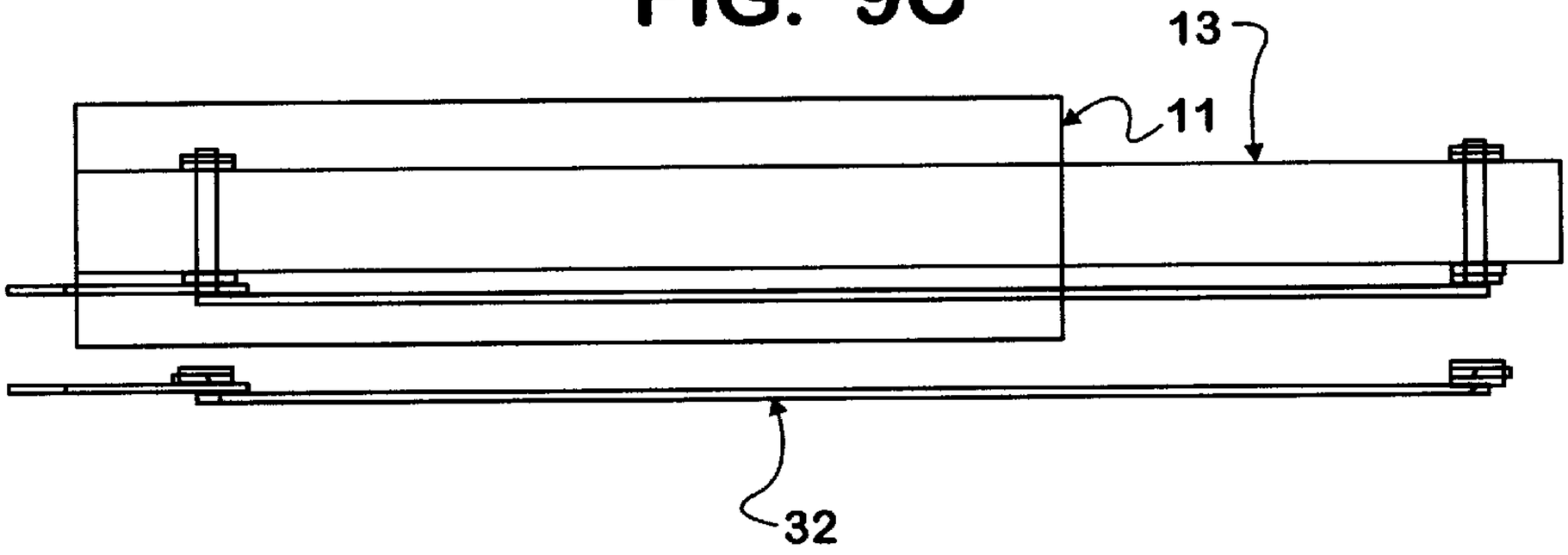
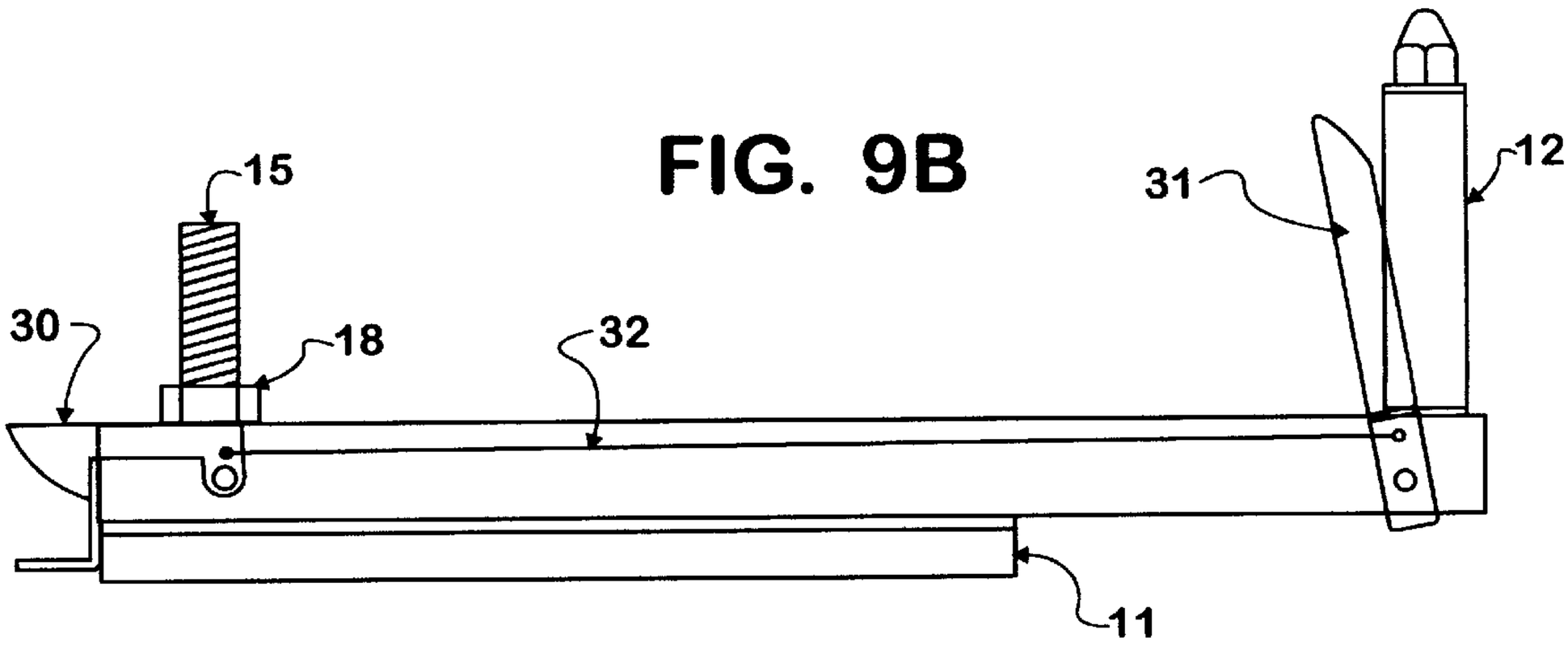


FIG. 9B



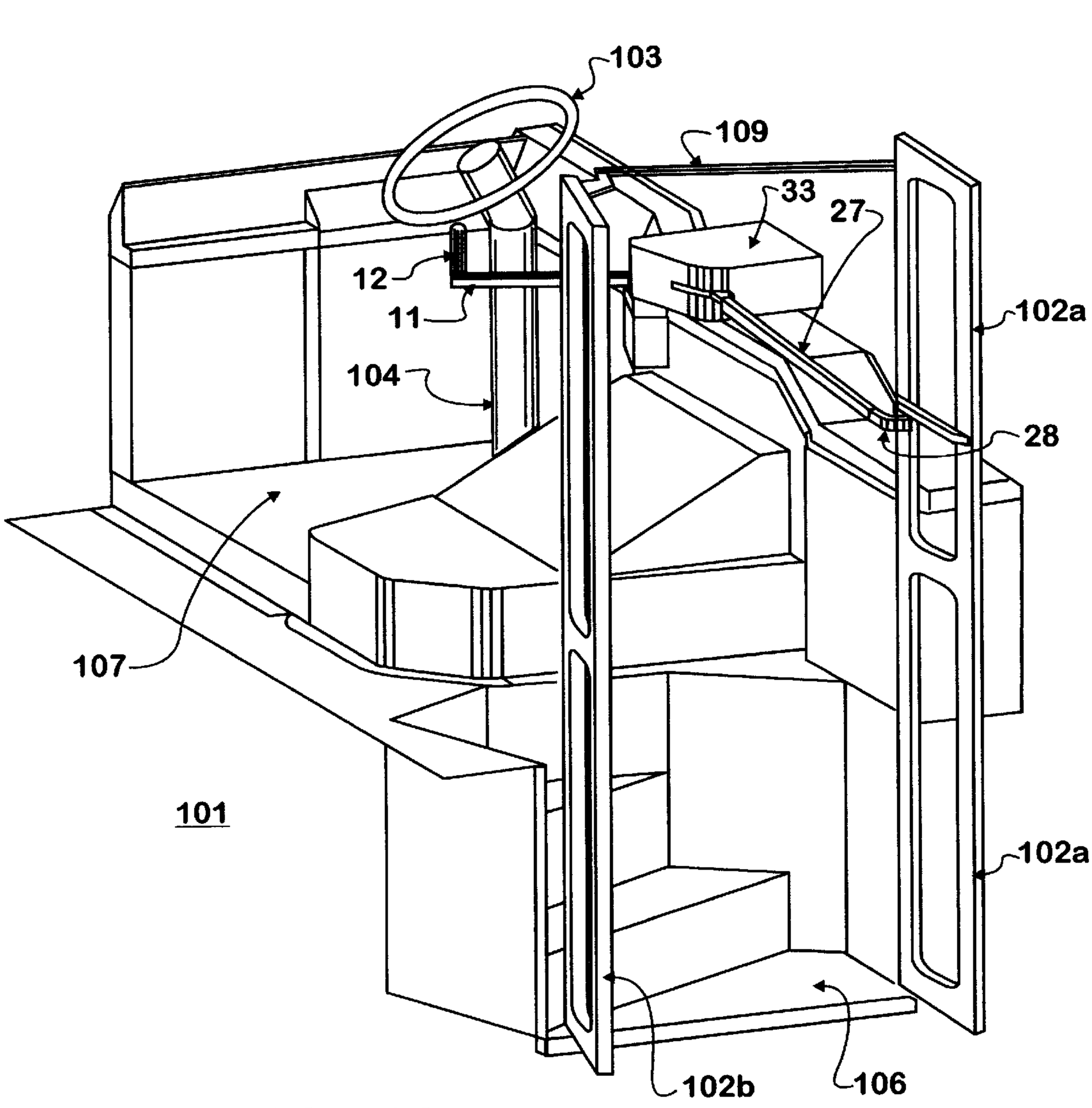


FIG. 10

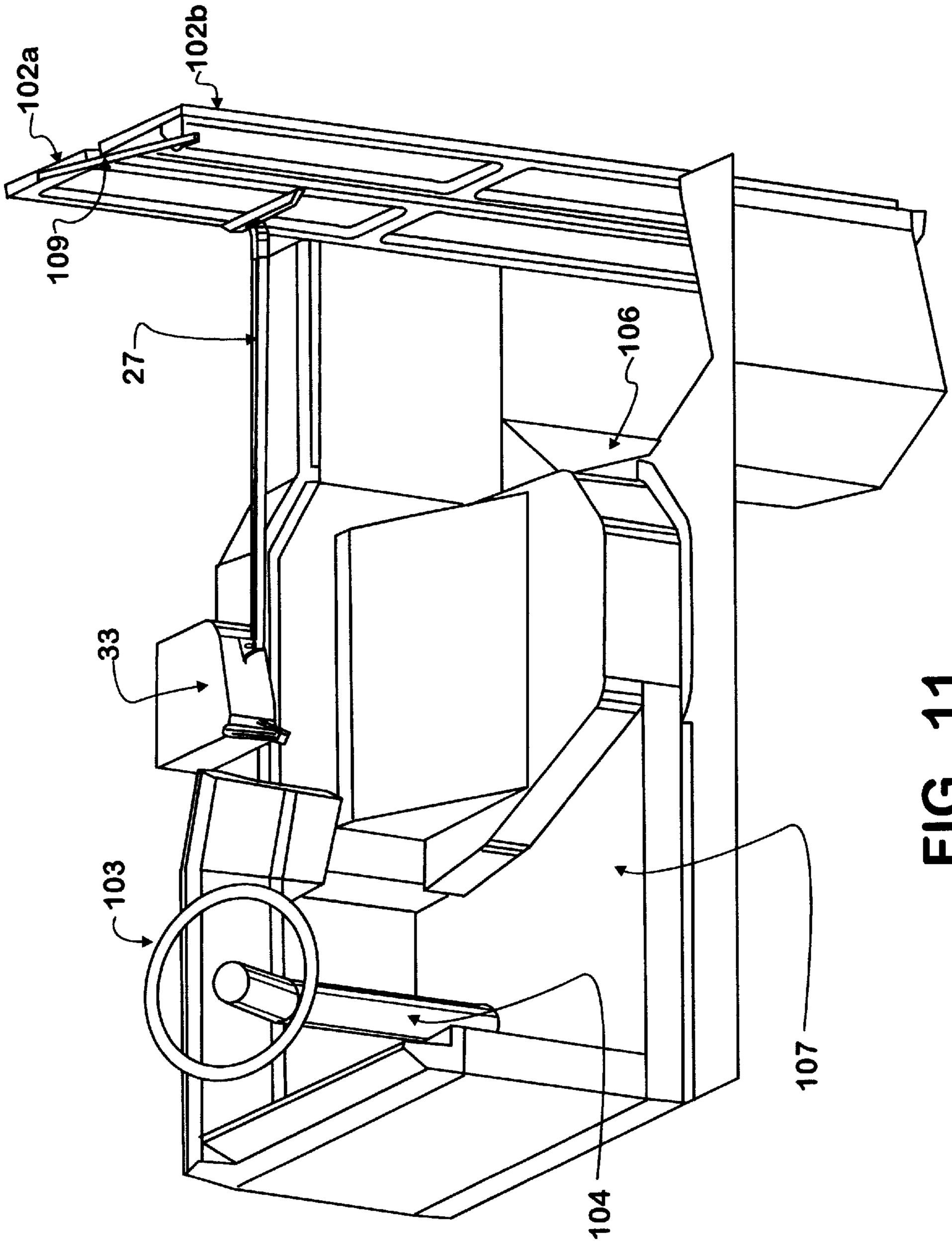


FIG. 11

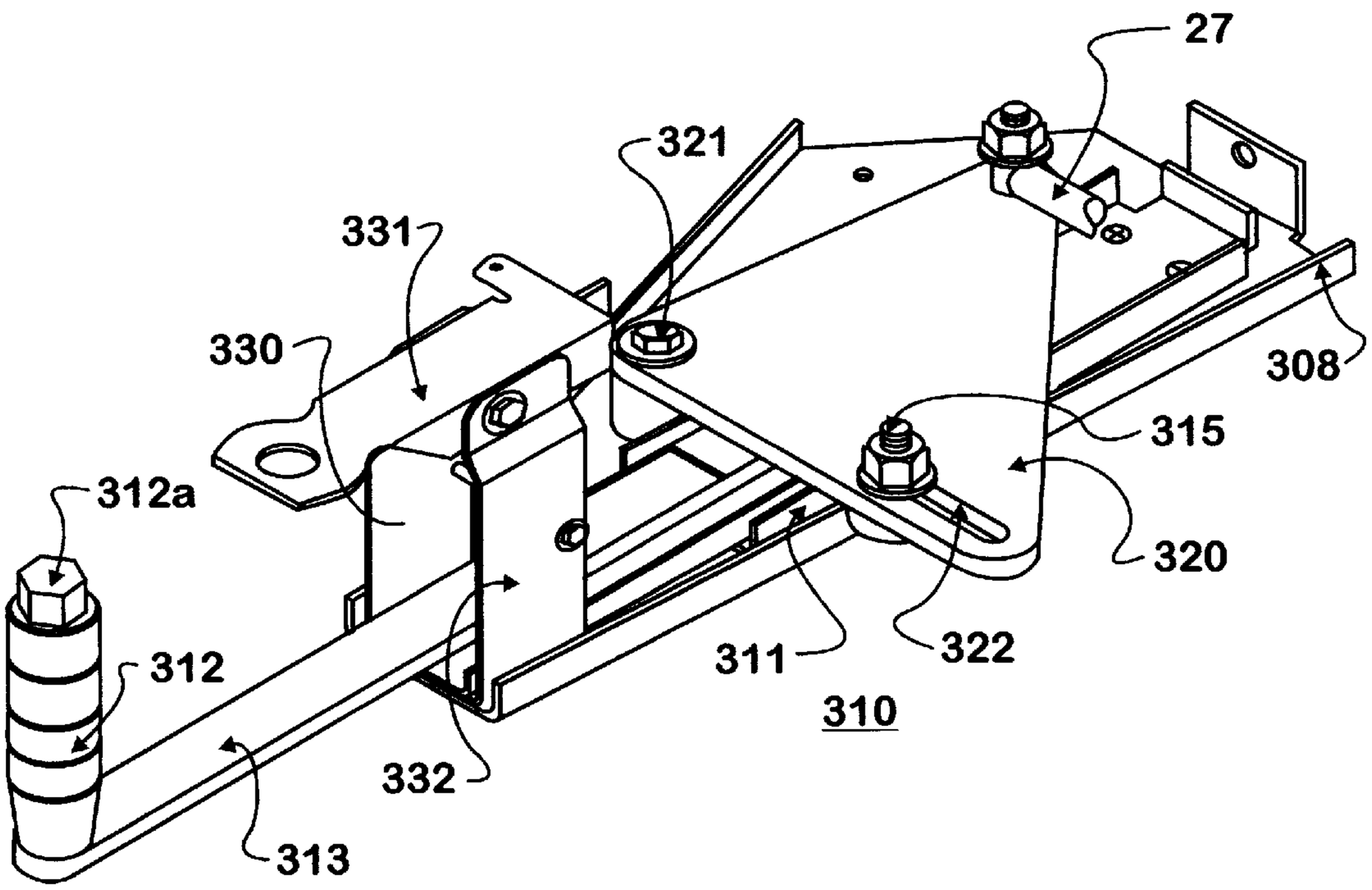


FIG. 12

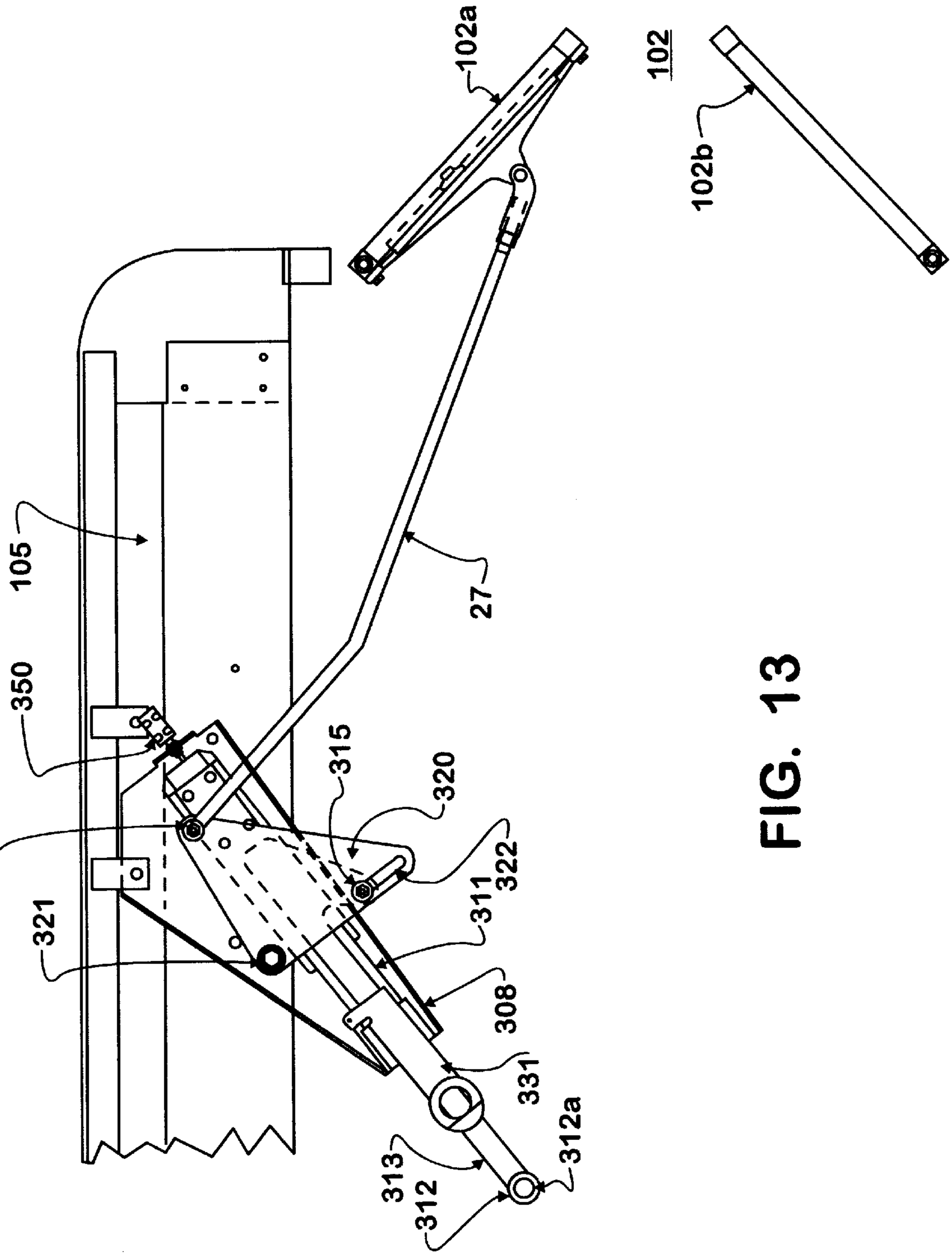

102a
102
102b
105
27
350
326
315
320
322
311
321
308
331
312a
313
312

FIG. 13

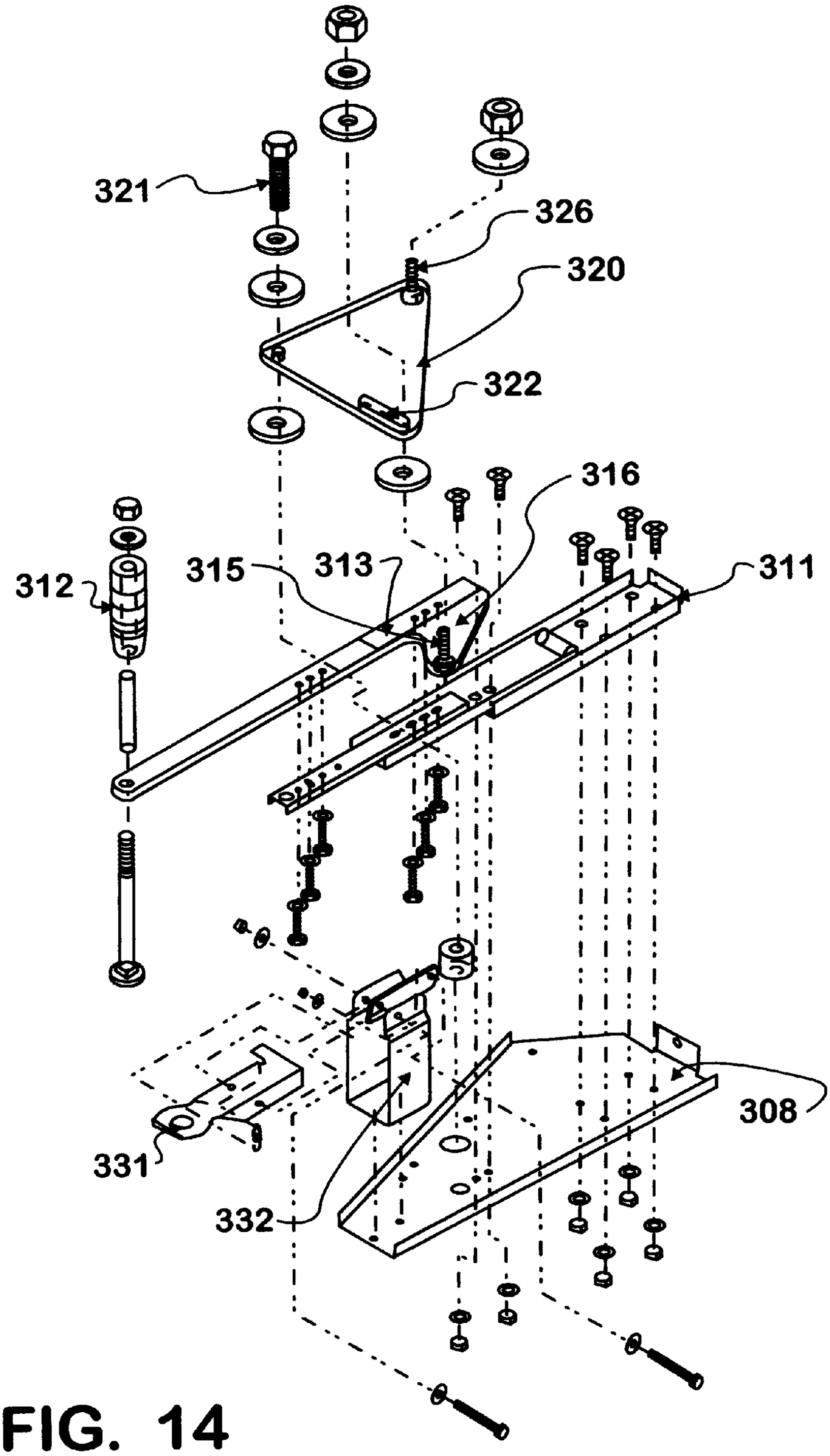


FIG. 14

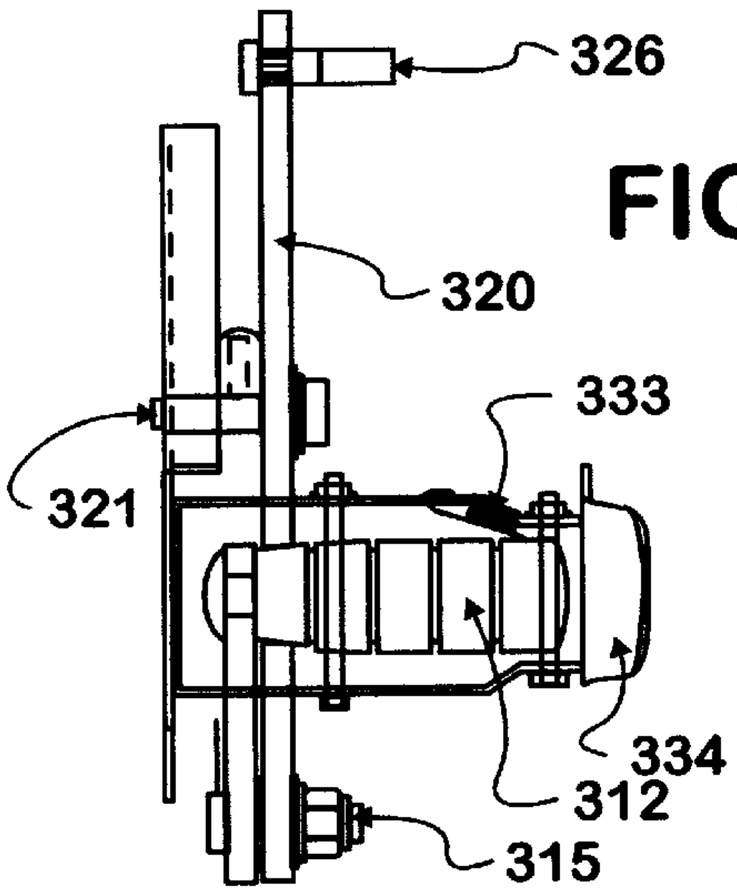


FIG. 17

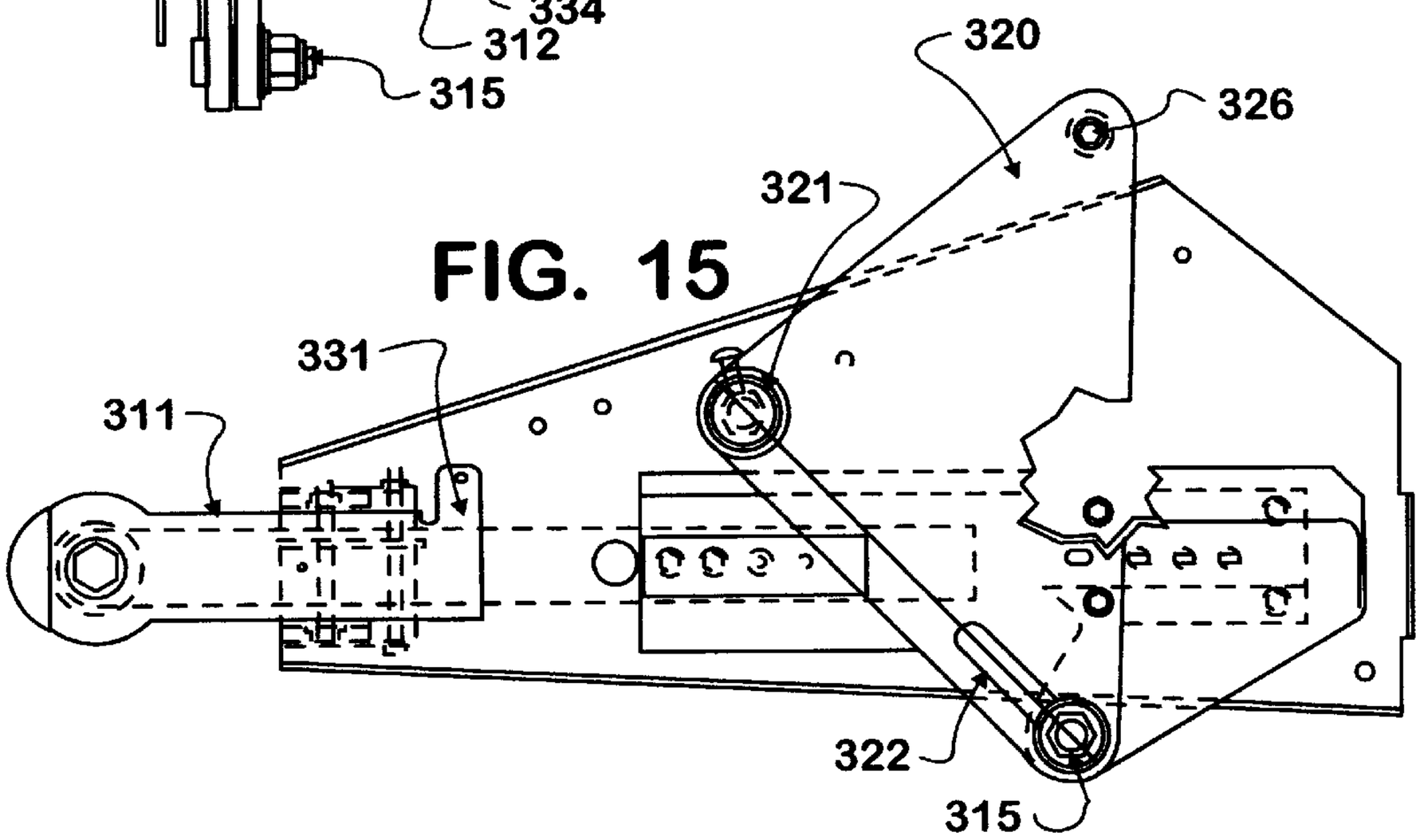


FIG. 15

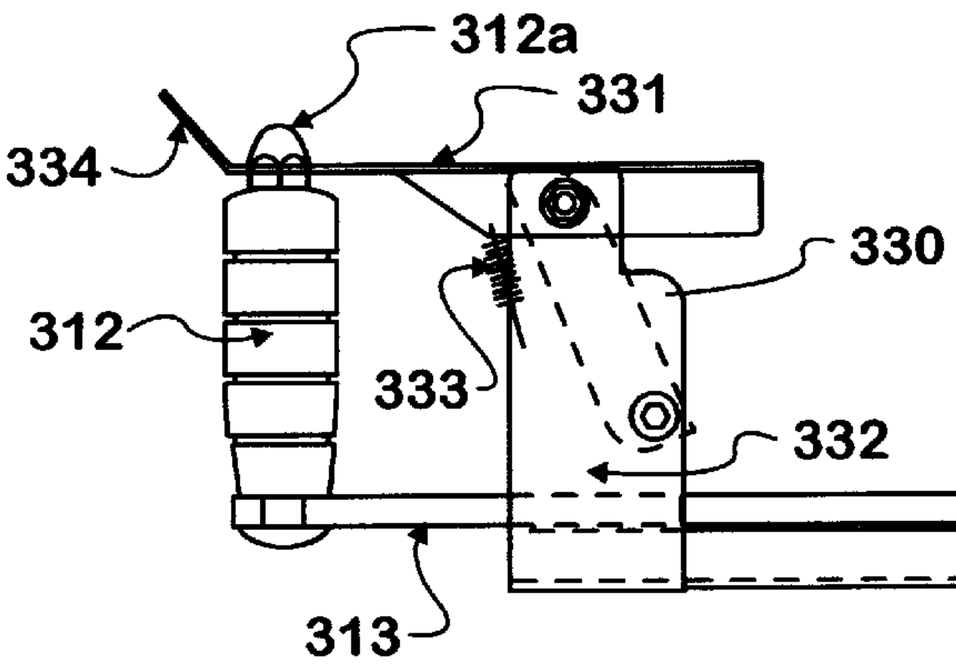
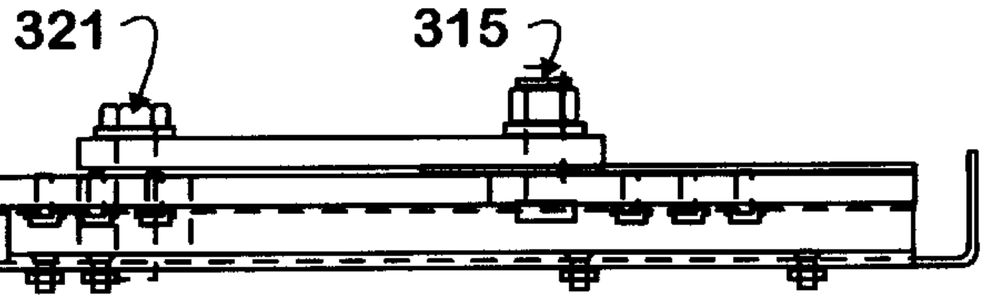


FIG. 16



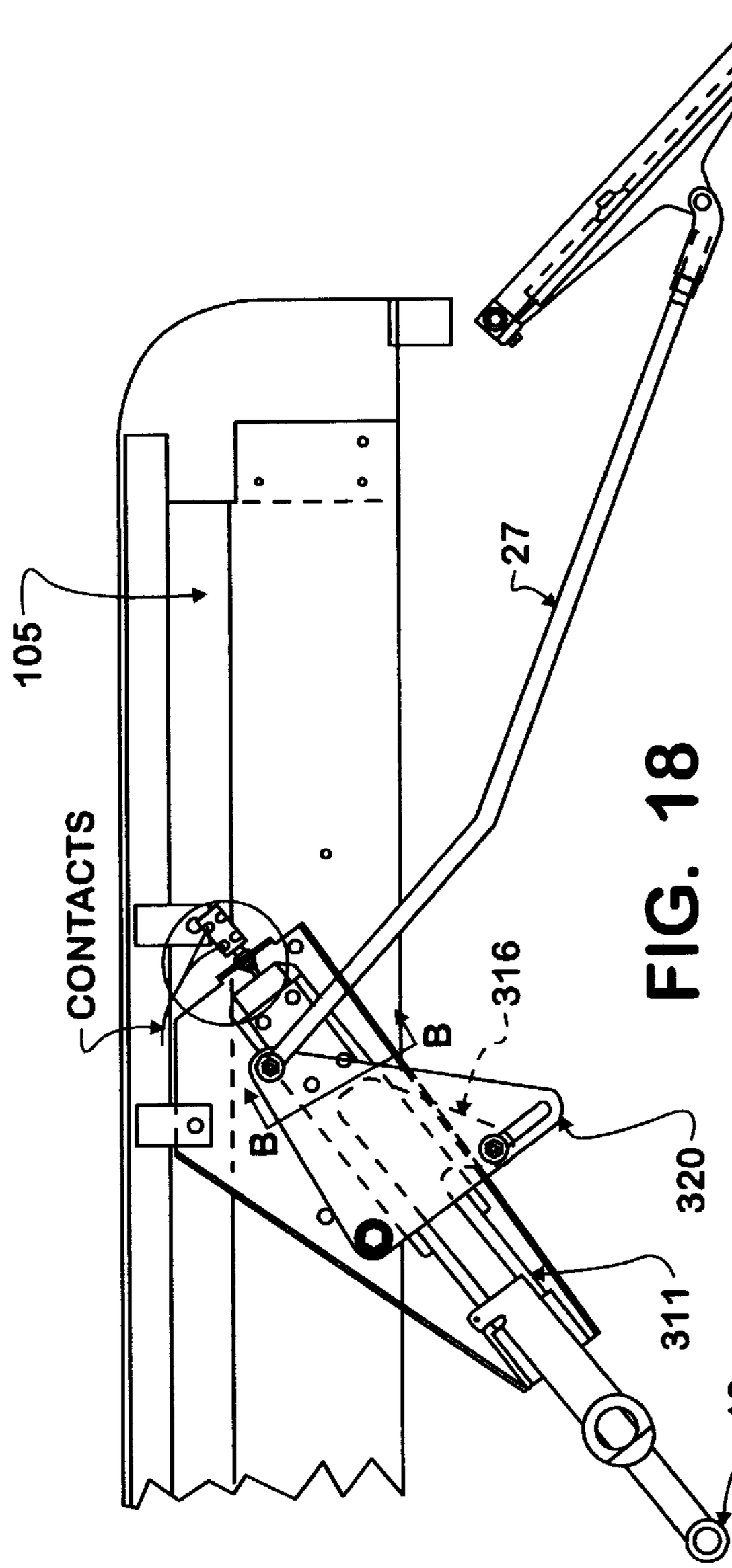


FIG. 18

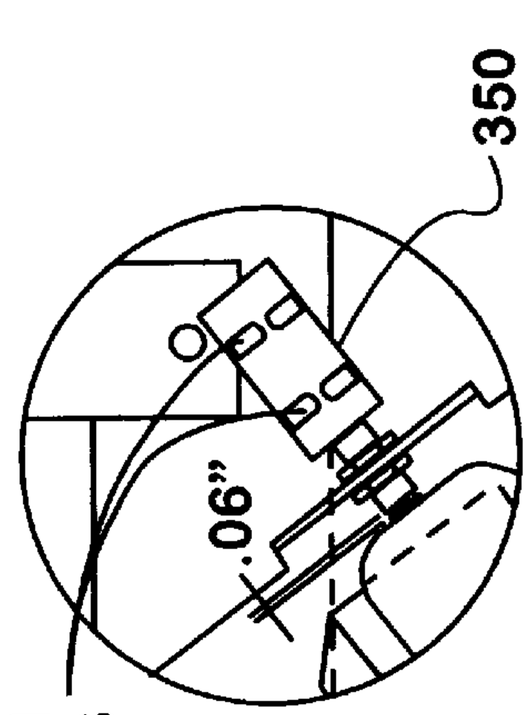


FIG. 19

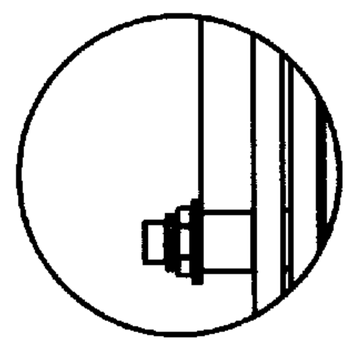


FIG. 20

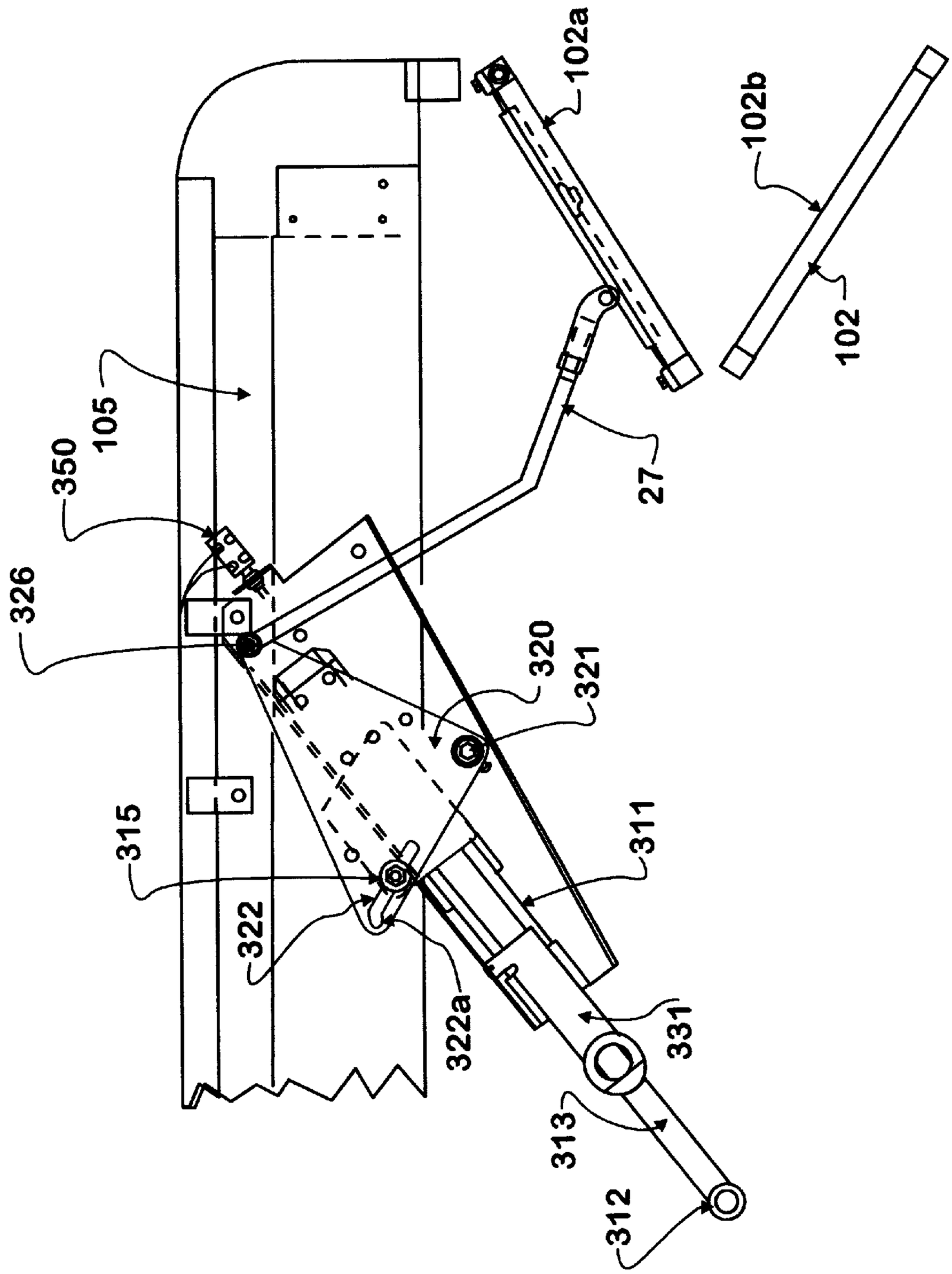

102a
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FIG. 21

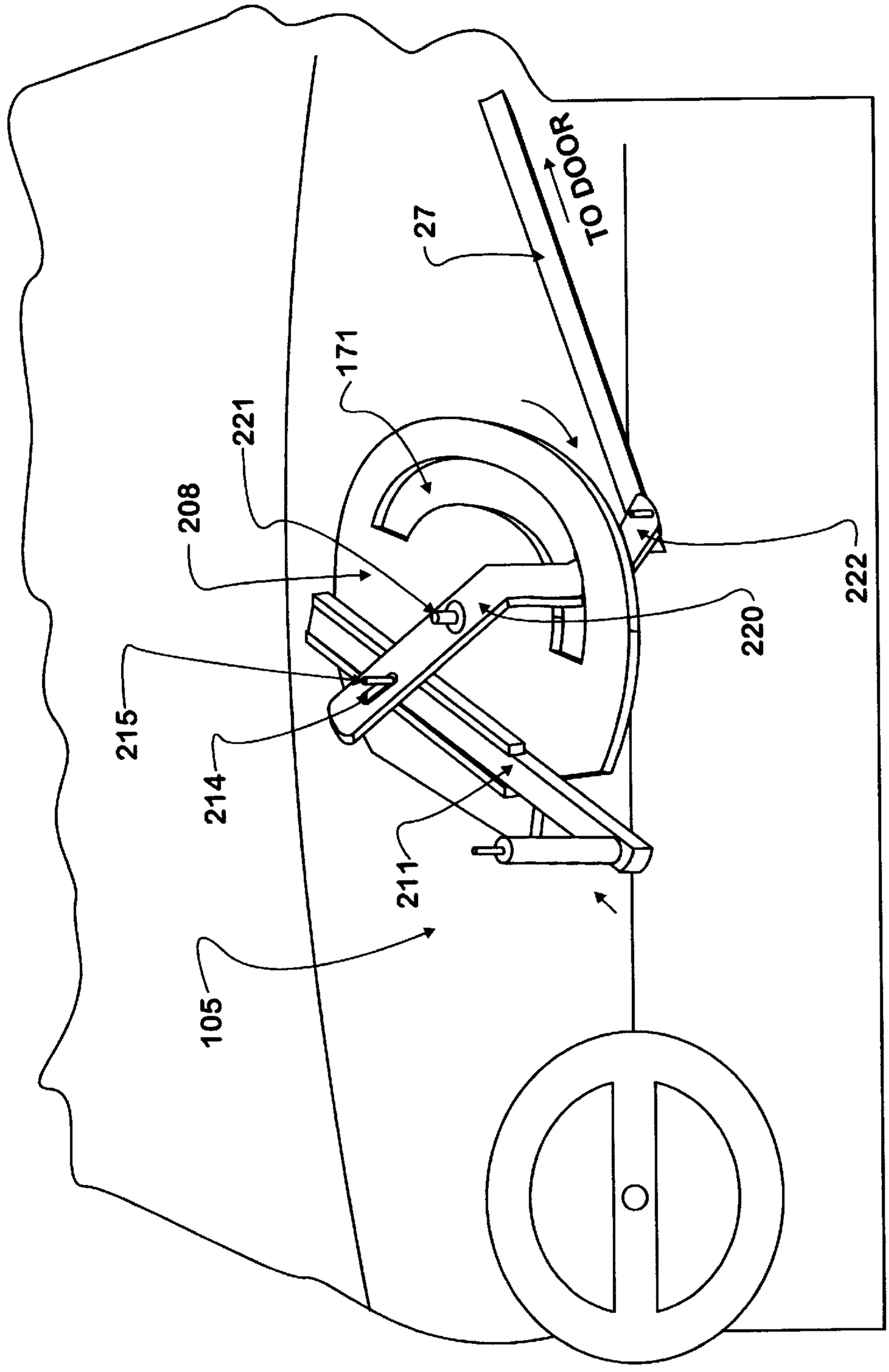

FIG. 22

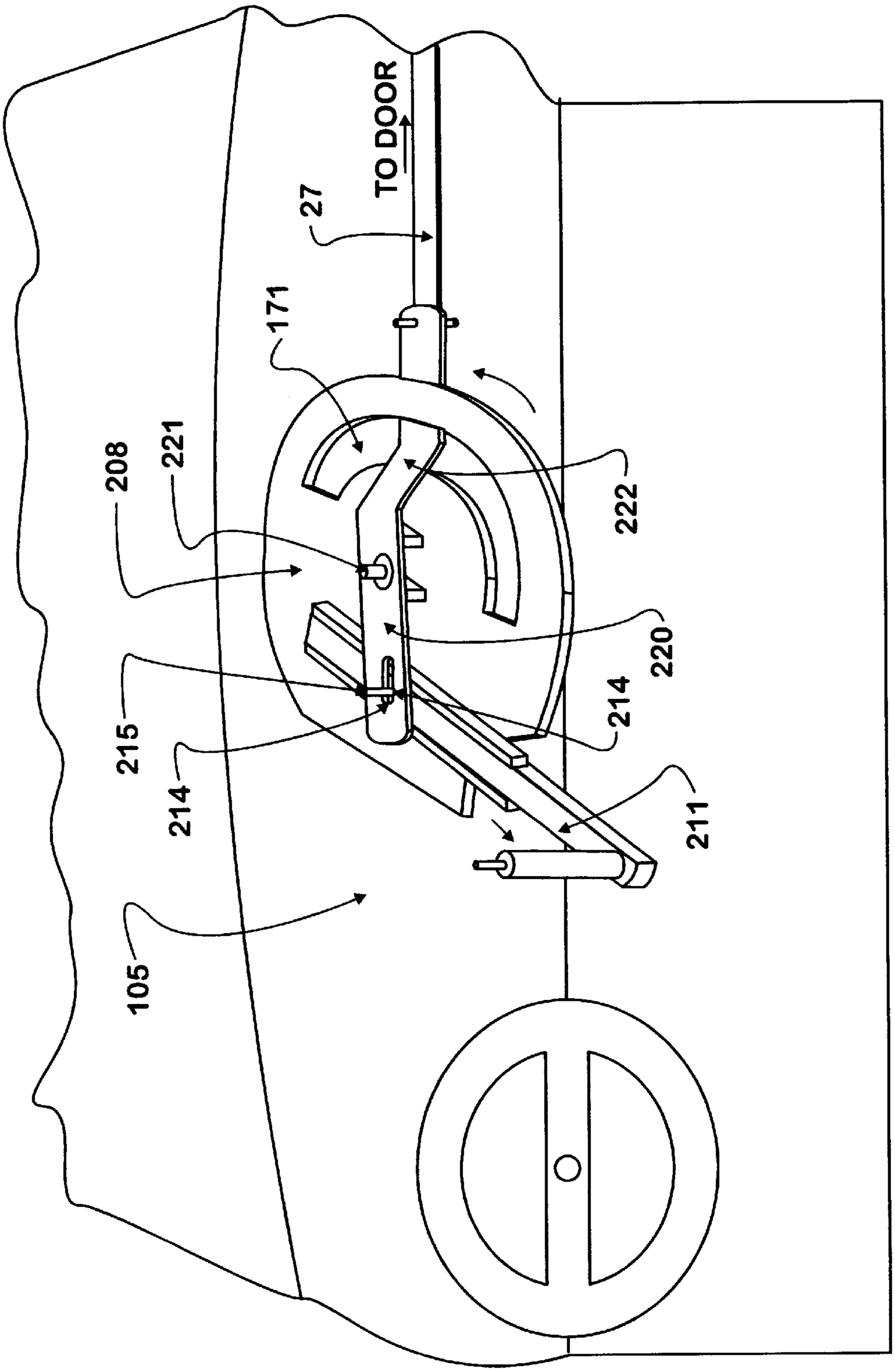

FIG. 23

SCHOOL BUS DOOR OPERATOR

This is a non-provisional application claiming priority under provisional patent application Ser. No. 60/101,065, filed Sep. 18, 1998.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an improved school bus door operator for a school bus, or other public transportation vehicle or bus. The improved school bus door operator of this invention consists of a linear arm movement actuated school bus door operator with a handle for operation by the driver and the linkage tying the operator to the school bus door. The linear actuated school bus door operator allows the driver of the school bus to open and close the school bus door with a back and forth short-stroke linear movement of the handle. This should reduce repetitive stress injuries which school bus drivers have occasioned.

PRIOR ART

In recent years, there has been an increase in school bus driver injuries that may be attributed to the standard configuration of the manually operated school bus door operator. The prior art school bus door operator required the driver to grasp a handle and move the handle in a crank-like motion rotating the handle in a semi-circular movement in order to open or close the school bus door. The standard movement of the crank handle of the prior art required the driver to lean forward and reach out to grasp the operator and then rotate a lever using the handle in a semicircular fashion in order to actuate the door. Prior art school bus door operating apparatus of this type are shown in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,722,303; 3,889,420; 3,961,660; and 4,200,167.

To date, a school bus door operator has not been suggested which allows the driver to maintain good posture in the driver seat while manually opening and closing the school bus door with a short-stroke back or forth linear motion of an operating mechanism handle.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

As a result, a primary object of this invention is to provide an improved school bus door operator that allows the driver to maintain good posture in the driver seat while opening and closing the school bus door with a short-stroke back or forth linear motion of a door handle. A second object of the invention is to provide a school bus door operator that will not interfere with the school bus driving controls. A third object of the invention is to provide an improved school bus door operator that has its greatest torque or moment arm where needed. The most energy in school bus door operation is required at the end of the stroke where the door is approaching fully open, leaving the fully open, approaching fully closed or leaving the fully closed position. A fourth object of the invention is to provide an improved school bus door operator that may be fitted with a screw type linear actuating motor on an air operated piston.

The improved school bus door operator of this invention satisfies all of the above objects plus others not mentioned. The improved school bus door operator generally consists of a handle slide mechanism, a rotatable pivot arm, and a door linkage arm engaged to the school bus door. The handle slide mechanism further consists of a slide arm that may be moved linearly within the handle slide mechanism. The slide arm has a handle that juts out generally in a vertical direction at a rearward portion of the slide arm. There is an engagement bolt or pawl on the slide arm. In one embodiment, the engagement bolt is at the opposite end of the slide arm from where the handle is engaged. In the preferred embodiment, the engagement bolt is at a mid-position along the slide arm. The engagement bolt also juts out from the slide arm in a generally vertical direction. The rotatable pivot arm in one embodiment has two guide rails. The engagement bolt of the slide arm fits between the guide rails of the rotatable pivot arm. In the preferred embodiment, the guide rails are replaced by a through-slot in the rotatable pivot arm in which the engagement bolt of the slide arm rides within. The rotatable pivot arm has a pivot bolt or pin, which allows the pivot arm to rotate on the dash or other mounting surface in the school bus. When the handle of the slide arm is moved in a linear direction in the handle slide mechanism, the engagement bolt moves freely between and parallel to the guide rails or within the through-slot of the pivot arm depending on the embodiment. This movement of the engagement bolt causes the guide rails or through-slot and hence the rotatable pivot arm to rotate in a semi-circular radial fashion. The rotatable pivot arm pivots about or on the pivot bolt or pin. The door linkage arm is engaged to an end or corner of the rotatable pivot arm opposite the side of the guide rails. Where the rotatable pivot arm is generally triangular, the linkage arm will be engaged to a corner as will the guide rails or through-slot. As the rotatable pivot arm rotates on or about the pivot bolt, the door linkage arm is moved to either open or close the school bus door in a similar fashion as in the prior art. The movement of the engagement bolt or pin between the guide rails or through-slot varies the moment arm or mechanical advantage the driver has in opening or closing the door. The longer the moment arm the more torque the driver generates with the same force input to the handle. At the farthest forward and rearward points of the stroke of the slide arm, the moment arm comprised of the distance from the engagement bolt along the guide rails or through-slot to the pivot bolt of the rotatable pivot arm is at relative maximums and hence relative maximum torque values. The mounting location of the handle slide mechanism and the pivot bolt of the rotatable pivot arm is arranged for ease of operation by an average driver, whether they be male or female. The driver may sit with good posture in the driver seat, grasp the handle and move the slide in a linear fashion back or forth along the handle slide mechanism. This in turn causes the rotatable pivot arm to pivot and hence cause the school bus door to either open or close. A screw type motor for driving the slide arm in a linear fashion back and forth along the slide mechanism may be installed to remove the requirement for manual movement by the driver.

In another embodiment of the invention the rotatable pivot arm is mounted to a dash mount that has a semicircular arc slot cut in its face. The end of the rotatable pivot arm opposite the end with guide rails or engagement pawl directive means has a double bend zigzag arm which rides in the semicircular arc slot in the face of the dash mount. The inner ends of the semicircular arc slot act as over-travel limits for the rotatable pivot arm and the handle slide mechanism. In all embodiments, the handle slide mechanism may also contain a locking device that locks the handle in the door-closed position.

DRAWINGS

Other objects and advantages of the invention will become more apparent upon perusal of the detailed description thereof. In upon inspection of the drawings, in which:

FIG. **1** is a partial cut away of a driver area of a school bus vehicle with an improved school bus door operator made in accordance with this invention, engaged to a school bus door which is open.

FIG. **2** is the school bus driver area of FIG. **1** shown with the school bus door closed.

FIG. **3** is an improved school bus door operator shown disengaged from the door linkage of the school bus made in accordance with this invention.

FIG. **4** is the top down view of a school bus driver area showing the ergonomic profile.

FIG. **5** is a top down view of the improved school bus operator of FIG. **3**.

FIG. **6** is a back looking front side view of the improved school bus door operator of FIG. **3**.

FIG. **7** is a front looking back side view of the improved school bus door operator of FIG. **3**.

FIG. **8** is a school bus door side view of the improved school bus door operator of FIG. **3**.

FIG. **9***a* is a sideview of the handle slide mechanism of the improved school bus door operator of FIG. **3**, with a locking actuator disengaged.

FIG. **9***b* is a sideview of the handle slide mechanism of FIG. **9***a* with the locking actuator engaged.

FIG. **9***c* is a bottom view of the handle slide mechanism of FIG. **9***a*.

FIG. **10** is a partial cut away drawing of a school bus driver area with an improved school bus door operator with a protective cover installed which may house a motor made in accordance with this invention shown with the school bus door open.

FIG. **11** is a rear looking forward prospective view of the school bus driver area of FIG. **10** with the school bus door closed.

FIG. **12** is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of an improved school bus door operator made in accordance with this invention.

FIG. **13** is a top down view of the door operator of FIG. **12** installed on a push to open double flap door shown installed in a partial view of the a school bus driver area and with the door open.

FIG. **14** is an exploded perspective view of the improved school bus door shown in FIG. **12**.

FIG. **15** is a top down view of the improved school bus door shown in FIG. **12**.

FIG. **16** is a side view of the improved school bus door shown in FIG. **12**.

FIG. **17** is an end on view of the improved school bus doorshown in FIG. **12**.

FIG. **18** is a top down view of the improved school bus door shown in FIG. **12** with a handle slide position warning light actuation switch installed.

FIG. **19** is a blown up view of the ballooned portion of FIG. **18**.

FIG. **20** is view B—B from FIG. **18**.

FIG. **21** is a top down view of an improved school bus door operator made in accordance with this invention installed on a folding school bus door and shown with the door partially open.

FIG. **22** is a partial cut away of a driver area of a school bus vehicle with another embodiment of an improved school bus door operator made in accordance with this invention shown with the door linkage arm in a retracted towards driver position.

FIG. **23** is a partial cut away of a the improved door opener of FIG. **22** with the door linkage arm in an extended from the driver position.

DETAILS OF INVENTION

FIGS. **1** to **11** show a school bus vehicle **101** with an improved school bus door operator **10** made in accordance with this invention. This invention would work as well in non-school bus vehicle applications such as in tour buses or airport transport buses. A driver area **107** of the school bus **101** is shown in FIGS. **1, 2, 10** and **11**. The school bus **101** shown is a left hand drive school bus although the invention may be made for a right hand drive bus. The driver sits on the left hand side and operates a steering wheel **103** engaged to a steering wheel column **104**. A school bus door **102** consisting of a forward section **102***a* and a rearward section **102***b* is engaged to the vehicle **101** on the right side of the vehicle **101**. The forward section **102***a* and the rearward section **102***b* are in a line when the door **102** is closed and are folded at an angle when the door **102** is open. A door-to-door engagement arm **109** is engaged between the forward section **102***a* and rearward section **102***b* of the school bus door **102**. When the school bus door **102** is open, passengers enter the vehicle **101** via steps **106**. A door linkage arm **27** is engaged to an outer frontward section of the forward section **102***a* of the school bus door **102** through a linkage-to-engagement hinge **28**. The opposite side of the door linkage arm **27** of that engaged to the forward section **102***a* of the school bus door **102** is engaged to the improved school bus door operator **10**. Operator movements of the door linkage arm **27** causes the forward section **102***a* to move which, in turn, causes the rearward section **102***b* to move through the door-to-door engagement arm **109**. The improved school bus operator **10** is engaged to a dash or dashboard **105** of the vehicle **101**. The invention will work as well for folding doors where the forward section **102***a* is directly hinged to the rearward section **102***b* with no door-to-door engagement arm **109** as shown in FIG. **21**.

The improved school bus door operator **10** generally is comprised of a handle slide mechanism **11**, a rotatable pivot arm **20** with the rotatable pivot arm **20** engaged to the door linkage arm **27** for operating the school bus door **102**. The handle slide mechanism **11** has a slide arm **13** which may be moved in a linear fashion back or forth along the length of the handle slide mechanism **11**. FIGS. **3** and **5** show direct of withdrawal direction arrow Z to illustrate the relative movement of the slide arm **13** to the handle slide mechanism **11**. A rearward top surface of the slide arm **13** has a handle **12**, the handle **12** may be cylindrical in shape and may be vertical or tilted at an angle for ease of grasping by the driver. The forward portion of the slide arm **13** opposite the end with the handle **12** has an engagement bolt or pawl **15** also in an upward facing vertical position. The lower portion of the engagement bolt **15** is engaged to a forward portion of the slide arm **13**. In one embodiment, the engagement bolt or pawl is engaged to an upper face of the forward portion of the slide arm **13**, although the engagement bolt or pawl **15** may also be engaged to a lower face of the slide arm **13**. The handle slide mechanism **11** may be mounted either directly to the dash **105** or to a dash mount **108** which in turn would be then mounted to the dash **105** or other part of the school bus vehicle **101**. The rotatable pivot arm **20** is engaged to a pivot bolt **21** which in turn is engaged to either the dash **105**, or should it be used, to the dash mount **108**, or other part of the driver area **107**. These mounting arrangements and the short-stroke of the slide arm **13** will prevent the improved school bus door operator **10** from interfering with the vehicle **101** driving controls. The rotatable pivot arm **20** may be rotated about the pivot bolt **21**. The rotatable pivot arm **20** has two generally rectangular shaped guide rails **14**. The guide rails are one example of an engagement pawl directive

means. Another example will be described later in the preferred embodiment. The guide rails **14** are parallel and spaced to accommodate the exterior diameter of the engagement bolt **15** of the slide arm **13**. As the handle **12** is grasped and moved in a linear fashion either back or forth directing the slide arm **13** along the handle slide mechanism **11**, the engagement bolt **15** moves between the guide rails **14** of the rotatable pivot arm **20**. Assuming the handle **12** is at its forward most position to start and thereby directing the slide arm **13** to its forward most position relative to the handle slide mechanism **11**, the engagement bolt **15** should be at a farthest most end of the guide rails **14**. The guide rails **14** may each have an over travel stop **29**, which juts inward to prevent the engagement bolt **15** from becoming disengaged should the handle **12** be moved more forward than its normal forward position. There is no relative vertical movement of the guide rails **14** relative to the engagement bolt **15**. The guide rails are sandwiched between two rotatable washers **35** on the engagement bolt **15** and then further sandwiched by an upper engagement washer **17** on one side and a lower engagement washer **19** on the lower side, and a lower spacer **18** below the lower engagement washer **19** to prevent relative vertical movement of the rails **14**. The rotatable washers may be of any low resistance material but in one embodiment are made of a Teflon impregnated fabric. The lower spacer **18**, the lower engagement washer **19**, the rotatable washers **35** are all engaged to the engagement bolt **15**. An upper engagement nut **16** fastens the upper engagement washer **17** and all lower components in a fixed vertical position. The upper engagement nut **16** may be a nylon type locknut in one embodiment. As the handle **12** is moved in a linear fashion backward from its most forward position, the slide arm **13** moves generally rearward also. It should be noted that the handle slide mechanism **11** and hence the slide arm **13** in the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1** to **9** will be mounted at a slight angle off of the front to rear axis of the vehicle **101**. This slight angle of the forward to back plane of the handle slide mechanism **11** is considered the most ergonomically efficient. With the slide arm **13** at its most forward position, the guide rails **14** and rotatable pivot arm **20** combination moment arm is at a maximum. As the slide arm **13** is slid rearward linearly along the handle slide mechanism **11**, the moment arm of the guide rails **14** and rotatable pivot arm **20** combination decreases. The engagement bolt **15** moving along the guide rails **14** to a closer position to the pivot bolt **21** of the rotatable pivot arm **20** reduces the moment arm. At an intermediate position of the school bus door **102**, the moment arm of the guide rails **14** and rotatable pivot arm **20** combination reaches a minimum. This also corresponds to a minimum need as far as torque to move the school bus door **102** through the door linkage arm **27**. As the rotatable pivot arm **20** rotates about the pivot bolt **21**, the door linkage arm **27**, engaged to the rotatable pivot arm **20** at the door linkage engagement hole **26**, moves to open the school bus door **102**. This is due to the counter clockwise rotation of the rotatable pivot arm **20**. As the slide arm **13** passes the intermediate position, the guide rails **14** and rotatable pivot arm **20** combination moment arm increases due to the relative movement of the engagement bolt **15** away from the pivot bolt **21** of the rotatable pivot arm **20**. Following this increase in moment arm, the school bus door **102** reaches the fully open position. The moment arm of the guide rails **14** and rotatable pivot arm **20** again reaches a maximum as the school bus door **102** reaches the fully open position. The school bus door **102** is closed in an opposite fashion by moving the handle **12** and hence the slide arm **13** back to the most forward position.

The rotatable pivot arm **20** is engaged to the pivot bolt **21** as follows. A lower pivot nut **24** is at a lower end of the pivot bolt **21** and is flush against either the dash **105** or, if used, the dash mount **108**. A lower pivot washer **25** also encompassing the pivot bolt **21** is located above the lower pivot nut. The rotatable pivot arm **20** is sandwiched between two rotatable washers **35** and on a lower side additionally a lower pivot washer **25** and an intermediate pivot nut. On the upper side of the rotatable pivot arm **20** also engaged to the pivot bolt **21** is a rotatable washer **35** as mentioned previously, an upper pivot washer **23** and an upper pivot nut **22** locking the lower components in preset vertical position. The pivot bolt **21** passes through these rotational components to allow rotation of the rotatable pivot arm **20** with the pivot bolt **21** being engaged to either the dash **105** or, if used, the dash mount **108**. In the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1** to **9**, the rotatable pivot arm **20** is a five-sided flat plate, the sides being a long side **20***a*, two intermediate sides **20***b* and **20***c*, and two short ends **20***d*. The pivot bolt **21** is joined to the rotatable pivot arm **20** adjacent to where the intermediate sides **20***b* and **20***c* intersect. The guide rails **14** of the rotatable pivot arm **20** stick out from the forward most short end **20***d* of the rotatable pivot arm **20**. The rear most short end **20***d* is where the door linkage engagement hole **26** is engaged adjacent to an intermediate side **20***b* and the long side **20***a* of the rotatable pivot arm **20**. In the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1** to **9**, when the school bus door **102** is closed, the long side **20***a* of the rotatable pivot arm **20** is at a slight angle off of the front to rear axis of the vehicle **101** nearly opposite the angle of the handle slide mechanism **11** relative to the front to rear axis. The handle slide mechanism **11** may be a telescopic device in which the slide arm **13** fits within the slide mechanism **11**. When the handle **12** is retracted rearward to open the school bus door **102**, the slide arm **13** will be retracted from the slide mechanism **11**. The handle **12** may have a handle lock operator **31** rotatably engaged to the handle **12** through locking pins **33**. The handle lock operator **31** will be engaged to a locking line **32** which will also be engaged to a close-to-lock actuator **30** mounted on the slide arm **13** on the engagement bolt **15** end. When the handle lock operator **31** is squeezed by the driver, the locking line **32** will pull the close-to-lock actuator **30** and retract the actuator **30** from its locking position. The locking position of the close-to-lock actuator **30** fits flush against both front ends of the handle slide mechanism **11** and the slide arm **13**, preventing the slide arm **13** from being moved linearly rearward. When unlocked the close-to-lock actuator **30** will move with the slide arm **13**.

The preferred embodiment of the improved school bus operator **310** of this invention is shown in FIGS. **12** to **21**. Like the earlier shown embodiment, there is generally a handle slide mechanism **311**, a rotatable pivot arm **320** with the rotatable pivot arm **320** engaged to the door linkage arm **27** for operating the school bus door **102**. This embodiment functions similar to the earlier described embodiment. The handle slide mechanism **311** has a slide arm **313** with a handle **312**. The handle **312** may contain a locking pawl **312***a* that may lock the slide arm **313** in an inserted position. A slide arm locking mechanism **330** may be mounted to a dash mount **308** or to the slide mechanism **311** itself. The slide arm locking mechanism **330** will have a body **332** through which the slide arm **313** may move through and a spring loaded locking arm **331**. As shown the spring loaded locking arm **331** is rotatably engaged to the body **332**. Additionally, there is a spring **333** engaged between the spring loaded locking arm **331** and the body **332** to bias the locking arm **331** downwards. When the slide arm **313** is

inserted along the handle slide mechanism **311**, the upturned lip **334** of the locking arm **331** allows the locking pawl **312***a* of the handle **312** to slide under and into engagement with the locking arm **331**. The spring **333** biases the locking arm **331** to engaged the locking pawl **312***a*. Once the slide arm **313** is locked in an inserted position, the door **102** is locked in the closed position. The driver may release slide arm **313** by grasping the handle **312** and using her thumb or a finger to raise the upturned lip **334** while pulling the handle **312** outwards and hence directing the slide arm **313** along the slide mechanism **313**. Although only shown on this embodiment, this locking mechanism may be used on envisioned embodiments.

There is an engagement bolt or pawl **315** engaged to a wing **316** of the slide arm **313**. The wing **316** allows the engagement bolt or pawl **315** to be slightly off center relative to the line of back and forth movement of the slide arm **313**. The engagement bolt **315** is located at a mid-position along the slide arm **313** in comparison to the engagement bolt **15** of the slide arm **13** of the earlier embodiment which is located on an end opposite the handle **12**. There may be a wear pad made of nylon between the interface of the slide arm **313** and the rotatable pivot arm **320**. The preferred embodiment rotatable pivot arm **320** is generally triangularly shaped. One comer is rotatably fixed to the dash mount **308** or the dash **105** via a pivot bolt or pin **321**. The door linkage arm **27** is rotatably engaged through a door linkage pin **326** to an adjacent comer of the rotatable pivot arm **320** from the pivot bolt or pin **321**. The third comer of the rotable pivot arm contains a through-slot **322** through which the engagement bolt or pawl **315** of the slide arm **313** rides. The through-slot **322** performs the same function as the guide rails **14** of the earlier described embodiment and is another example of an engagement pawl directive means. As the driver of the vehicle disengages and moves the handle **312** of the slide arm **313** linearly along the handle slide mechanism **311** away from the slide arm locking mechanism **330**, the engagement bolt or pawl **315** will move in the same line as the slide arm **313**. The engagement bolt or pawl **315** will move within the through-slot **322** causing the rotatable pivot arm **320** to pivot about the pivot pin **321**. This rotation of the pivot arm **320** causes the door linkage pin **326** and hence the end of the door linkage arm **27** to move along an semicircular arc. The door **102** opens. This same design is shown for a forward folding door **102** in FIG. **21**. One difference is that the through-slot **322** and the pivot pin **21** relative positions are reversed. Additionally, the forward folding door version of FIG. **21** has a curved locking slot **322***a* in an end of the through-slot. The pawl **315** will engage into the locking slot **322***a* to allow the door to be locked in an open position. This will allow passengers to load the vehicle without the driver needing to hold the door **102** open.

A position switch or warning light activation switch **350** for the slide arm **313** and hence the door **102**, may be engaged such that the switch **350** is engaged when the slide arm **313** is fully inserted or removed. The switch shown in FIG. **18** to **20** indicates when the slide arm **313** is fully inserted and the door **102** is closed although the switch could be positioned to indicate the opposite positions.

In another embodiment of an improved school bus door operator **10**, as shown in FIGS. **22** and **23**, there is a dash mount **208**, which may be mounted to a dash **105** or other part of the vehicle **101**. The dash mount **208** has a semicircular arc slot **171** cut in its face. A rotatable pivot arm **220** is rotatably engaged to the dash mount **208** at a radial center of the semicircular arc slot **171**. The rotatable pivot arm **220** is engaged to the dash mount **208** through a pivot bolt **221** in a similar fashion as the rotatable pivot arm **20** is engaged to the dash mount **108** in the earlier described embodiment. The rotatable pivot arm **220** has guide rails **214** or equivalent engagement bolt directive means for an engagement bolt **215** on a handle slide mechanism **211** to ride in. The end of the rotatable pivot arm **220** opposite the end of pivot arm **220** with the guide rails **214** has a double bend zigzag arm **222** which rides in the semicircular arc slot **171** in the face of the dash mount **208**. The opposite internal ends of the semicircular arc slot **171** act as over-travel limits for the rotatable pivot arm **220** and the handle slide mechanism **11** back and forth maximum locations. The handle slide mechanism **11** may also contain a locking device that locks a handle **212** in the door-closed position.

The improved school bus door operator **10** may be motorized in one embodiment. FIGS. **10** and **11** show a covered version of the improved school bus door operator. There is a cover **33** mounted on the dash **105**. Within the cover there may be a linear screw type electric motor that has a screw shaft which drives in either a frontward and backward direction relative to the handle slide mechanism **11**. The screw shaft will be engaged to the slide arm **13** so that the motor will be able to drive the school bus door **102** open or close by linear movement of the slide arm **13**.

In another embodiment, an air-operated piston will be engaged to the slide arm **13**. The piston may be double-acting and that will cause the school bus door **102** to fail in one position, preferably the last door position. In another embodiment the piston will be single acting with a spring to bias the piston in one direction. Air will be used to hold the school bus door closed in the preferred piston embodiment. More directly, air will be used through the piston to maintain the slide arm **13** in the closed position with the spring biasing piston and hence the slide arm **13** to the open position. In alternative embodiments, the piston may be hydraulically or electrically operated. The electrically operated could be a solenoid valve.

As described above, the improved school bus door operators of the present invention, and the vehicle **101** with the improved school bus door operators installed provide a number of advantages, some of which have been described above and others of which are inherent in the invention. Also modifications may be proposed to the improved school bus door operators **10** and **310** and the vehicle **101** with the improved school bus door operators installed without departing from the teachings herein.

We claim:

1. An improved vehicle door operator for use on a vehicle with a driver area on one side and a dash in a forward area of the vehicle, a door with at least two sections, the door being on a side of the vehicle opposite the driver area, the door sections in a line when the door is closed and folded when the door is open, and operation of one door section causing the other section to reposition, comprising:

a handle slide mechanism engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said slide mechanism having a slide arm which may be moved in linear fashion back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

said slide arm having a handle engaged to a rearward surface and said handle within reach of a vehicle driver seated in the driver area;

a forward portion of said slide arm has an engagement pawl;

a rotatable pivot arm rotatably engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said rotatable pivot arm having engagement pawl directive means between which said engagement pawl rides when said slide arm is moved back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

a door linkage arm engaged at one end to one of the door sections;

said door linkage arm rotatably engaged at another end to said rotatable pivot arm;

said door linkage arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly backwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing the door section engaged to said door linkage arm to open; and

said door linkage arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly inwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing the door section engaged to said door linkage arm to close.

2. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **1**, wherein:

said engagement pawl directive means are guide rails.

3. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein:

said handle slide mechanism is mounted at a slight angle off of a front to rear axis of the vehicle.

4. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein:

said slide arm moves on said handle slide mechanism telescopically.

5. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **3**, wherein:

the structural component to which said handle slide mechanism is mounted is the dash.

6. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **3**, further comprising:

a dash mount which is mounted to a structural component of the vehicle.

7. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **6**, wherein:

the structural component to which said dash mount is mounted is the dash.

8. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **4**, wherein:

said handle is cylindrical in shape.

9. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein:

said rotatable pivot arm is rotatably engaged to the structural component of the vehicle through a pivot bolt.

10. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein;

said guide rails are rectangular in shape and parallel with each other.

11. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **10**, wherein:

said guide rails have an overtravel stop that juts inward between said guide rails to prevent said engagement pawl from becoming disengaged from said guide rails.

12. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **11**, wherein:

said guide rails are sandwiched between two rotatable washers on said engagement pawl and further sandwiched by an upper engagement washer on one side and a lower engagement washer on a lower side;

a lower spacer below said lower engagement washer to prevent relative vertical movement of said guide rails; and

said lower spacer, said lower engagement washer, said rotatable washers are all engaged to said engagement pawl.

13. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **12**, wherein:

said rotatable washers are made of a low resistance material.

14. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **13**, wherein:

said low resistance material is a teflon impregnated fabric.

15. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein:

a moment arm of said engagement pawl directive means and said rotatable pivot arm in combination is at a maximum when the door is near full open.

16. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **9**, wherein:

said rotatable pivot arm is a five-sided flat plate comprised of a long side, two intermediate sides, and two short ends;

said pivot bolt is joined to said rotatable pivot arm adjacent to where said intermediate sides intersect; and

said guide rails stick out from a forward most short end of said rotatable pivot arm;

said door linkage engagement hole **26** is engaged to a rear most short end adjacent to an intermediate side and said long side of said rotatable pivot arm.

17. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **2**, wherein:

a handle lock operator rotatably engaged to said handle through locking pins;

said handle lock operator engaged to a locking line also engaged to a close-to-lock actuator mounted on said slide arm on an end opposite said handle;

said handle lock operator upon squeezing by a driver causing said locking line to pill said close-to-lock actuator and retract said actuator from a locking position;

said close-to-lock actuator is said locking position fitting flush against both front ends of said handle slide mechanism and said slide arm preventing said slide arm form being moved linearity rearward; and

said close-to-lock actuator moving with said arm when unlocked.

18. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **1**, wherein:

said engagement pawl directive means is a through-slot.

19. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **18**, wherein:

said handle slide mechanism is mounted at a slight angle off of a front to rear axis of the vehicle.

20. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **18**, wherein:

said slide arm moves on said handle slide mechanism telescopically.

21. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **19**, wherein:

the structural component to which said handle slide mechanism is mounted is the dash.

22. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **19**, further comprising:

a dash mount which is mounted to a structural component of the vehicle.

23. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **22**, wherein:

the structural component to which said dash mount is mounted is the dash.

24. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **18**, wherein:

said handle is cylindrical in shape and generally vertical in position.

25. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **18**, wherein:

said rotatable pivot arm is generally triangularly shaped with one comer rotatably fixed to a structural component of the vehicle;

said door linkage arm rotatably engaged through a door linkage pin to an adjacent corner of said rotatable pivot arm; and

said third comer of said rotable pivot arm containing said through-slot through which said engagement pawl of said slide arm rides.

26. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **25**, wherein:

there is a slide arm locking mechanism.

27. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **26**, wherein said slide arm locking mechanism is comprised of:

a handle locking pawl on said handle;

a body through which said slide arm may move through;

a spring loaded locking arm rotatably engaged to said body;

a spring **333** engaged between said spring loaded locking arm and said body to bias said locking arm **331** downwards to engage said handle locking pawl;

an upturned lip of said locking arm allowing said handle locking pawl to slide under and into engagement with the locking arm when said slide arm is inserted;

said spring biasing said locking arm to engage said handle locking pawl; and

said upturned lip releasable by upwards pressure by a driver to release said slide arm and allow the door to open.

28. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **18**, wherein:

said engagement pawl is located off center relative to a centerline of said slide arm.

29. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **28**, wherein:

said engagement pawl is engaged to a wing of said slide arm.

30. An improved vehicle door operator in combination a vehicle, a door with at least two sections, the door being on a side of the vehicle opposite the driver area, the door sections in a line when the door is closed and folded when the door is open, and operation of one door section causing the other section to reposition, comprising:

a driver area on one side of the vehicle;

a dash in a forward area of the vehicle;

said door being on a side of the vehicle opposite said driver area;

said door sections in a line when said door is closed and folded when said door is open;

operation of one door section causing said other section to reposition;

a handle slide mechanism engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said slide mechanism having a slide arm which may be moved in linear fashion back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

said slide arm having a handle engaged to a rearward surface and said handle within reach of a vehicle driver seated in said driver area;

a forward portion of said slide arm has an engagement pawl;

a rotatable pivot am rotatably engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said rotatable pivot arm having engagement pawl directive means between which said engagement pawl rides when said slide arm is moved back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

a door linkage arm engaged at one end to one of said door sections;

said door linkage arm rotatably engaged at another end to said rotatable pivot arm;

said door linkage arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly backwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing said door section engaged to said door linkage arm to open; and

said door linkage arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly inwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing said door section engaged to said door linkage arm to close.

31. An improved vehicle door operator for use on a vehicle with a driver area on one side and a dash in a forward area of the vehicle, a door with at least two sections, the door being on a side of the vehicle opposite the driver area, the door sections in a line when the door is closed and folded when the door is open, and operation of one door section causing the other section to reposition, wherein said improvement is that driver moves a handle in a linear back and forth motion that is translated to rotational motion to operate one door section.

32. An improved vehicle door operator for use on a vehicle with a driver area on one side and a dash in a forward area of the vehicle, a door with at least two sections, the door being on a side of the vehicle opposite the driver area, the door sections in a line when the door is closed and folded when the door is open, and operation of one door section causing the other section to reposition, comprising:

a slide mechanism engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said slide mechanism having a slide arm which may be moved in linear fashion back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

said slide arm engaged to a motor operable by a driver in the driver area;

said motor capable of driving said slide arm inwards and outwards along said slide mechanism;

a forward portion of said slide arm has an engagement pawl;

a rotatable pivot arm rotatably engaged to a structural component of the vehicle;

said rotatable pivot arm having engagement pawl directive means between which said engagement pawl rides when said slide arm is moved back and forth along the length of the slide mechanism;

a door linkage arm engaged at one end to one of the door sections;

said door linkage arm rotatably engaged at another end to said rotatable pivot arm;

said door linkage arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly backwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing the door section engaged to said door linkage arm to open; and

said door engagement arm aligned such that when said slide arm is moved linearly inwards on said slide mechanism, causing said engagement pawl to move between said engagement pawl directive means, causing said rotatable pivot arm to rotate, causing said end of said door linkage arm engaged to said rotatable pivot arm to move along an arc, and causing the door section engaged to said door linkage arm to dose.

33. The improved vehicle door operator of claim **1**, further comprising:

a dash mount;

a semicircular arc slot in a face of said dash mount;

said rotatable pivot arm rotatably engaged to said dash mount at a radial center of said semicircular arc slot;

said rotatable pivot arm engaged to said dash mount through a pivot bolt;

one end of said rotatable pivot arm opposite said end of said pivot arm with said

engagement pawl directive means has a double bend zigzag arm;

said zigzag arm rides in said semicircular arc slot; and

opposite internal ends of said semicircular arc slot act as over-travel limits for said rotatable pivot arm and said handle slide mechanism.

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